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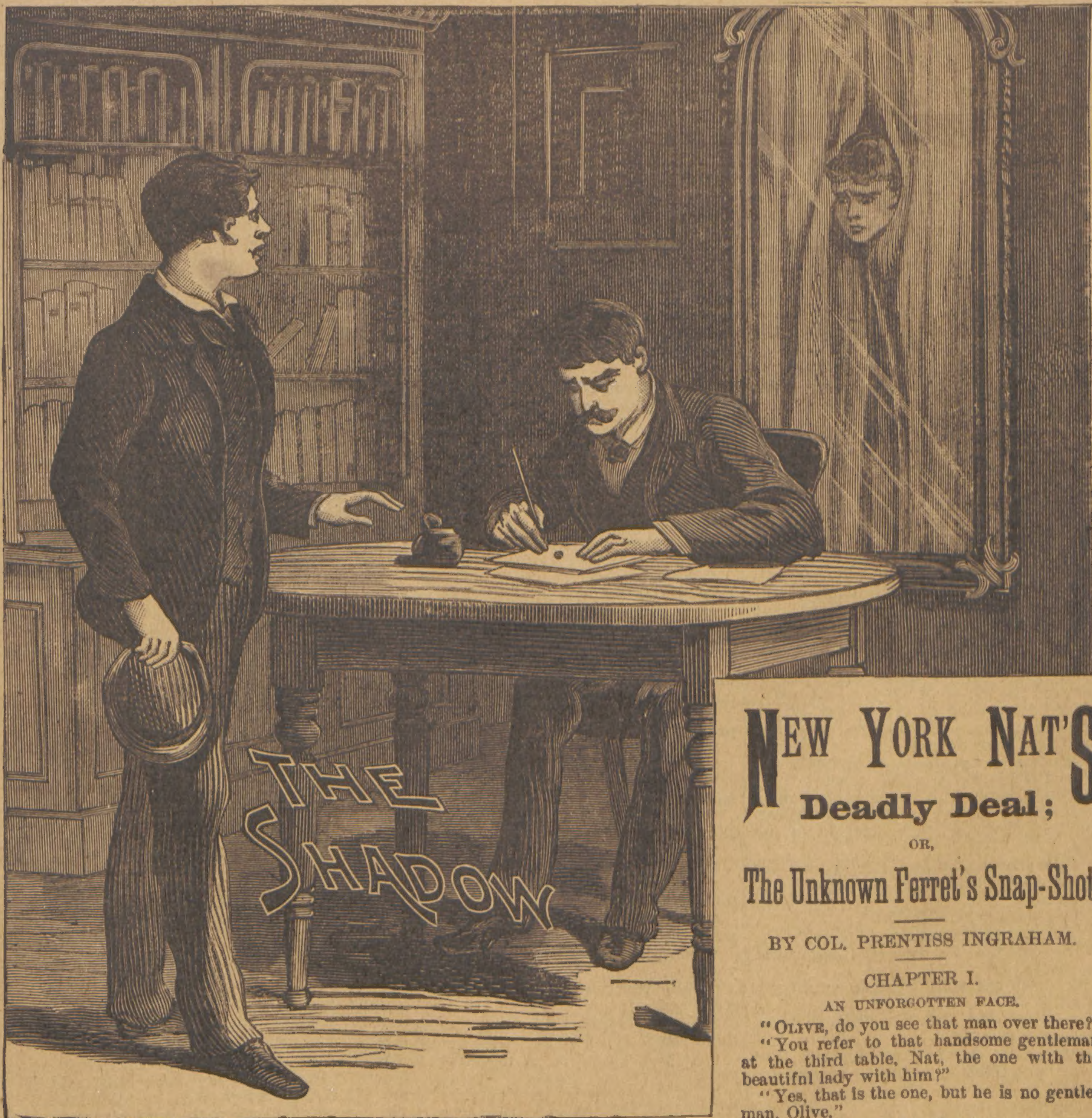
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THE SHADOW

NEW YORK NAT'S Deadly Deal;

OR,

The Unknown Ferret's Snap-Shot.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNFORGOTTEN FACE.

"OLIVE, do you see that man over there?"
"You refer to that handsome gentleman
at the third table, Nat, the one with the
beautiful lady with him?"

"Yes, that is the one, but he is no gentle-
man, Olive."

"Do you know him, Nat?"

WITH A BITTER OATH FRED RAYFIELD WROTE AS NEW YORK NAT DEMANDED.

"No; I do not know him, but I never forget a face."

"You have seen him before then?"

"Yes; but I cannot now say when or where."

"Then why decide that he is no gentleman?"

"Because I never forget a face, be it good or bad, man or woman, and I would stake my life on it that he is at heart a base villain whatever he may now appear to be."

"Well, Nat, you do read faces and characters wonderfully well, and are seldom mistaken; but I would say that the one you denounce is a very handsome man, refined, elegant and a gentleman, while the lady with him is certainly very beautiful, a most lovable face, one that is the index of a noble nature."

"She is all that, sir; I can swear to that."

"Do you know her?"

"I do."

"Who is she?"

"Do you rememoer the day I was hurt, stopping a pair of runaway horses in the Park?"

"Yes, and it was very nearly a fatal accident to you, Nat."

"It was, and yet not so bad as was at first supposed, Sis."

"I saw that the coachman had lost control of his horses, and that in the carriage was a young lady, while the driveway was crowded with vehicles."

"But I took big chances and checked the horses, one of them striking me the blow on my head which cut to the bone and stunned me."

"There were others to give help then; the coachman got control of the horses, and when I became conscious I was in a luxuriously furnished room, and several persons were present, one of them a doctor who was bending over me."

"I did not wish to be there, so I played possum, watched my chance, and a couple of hours after when the nurse was alone and asleep, I slipped out of the bed, hastily dressed and escaped from the house unseen."

"Yes, you wrote me you had a story to tell me of your accident, Nat, and I have been anxious to hear it; but why did you steal out of the house like a thief in the night?"

"Because it would never have done for my clothes to have been searched and the discovery made that I was New York Nat, the chief of the Unknown Boy Police, the leader of the mysterious young ferrets, who have so well served the great chief of the Secret Service Bureau of New York, and yet have been to him a mystery he could not fathom."

"Oh, no, I had with me the gold badge of our Secret League, Olive, and my notebook, and papers; all of which would betray me; so I determined to escape and did so. The blow on the head had only stunned me, the doctor had dressed the wound, and though dizzy I was able to go, and did."

"And where had you been taken?"

"To the home of the young lady whom I had saved, for she had me placed in the carriage and drove with me straight to her home."

"Then she sent for the doctor, and had the servants carry me to one of the best rooms in the house."

"She was a noble girl, Nat."

"Yes, and there she sits over there."

"The one with the man you denounced just now?"

"Yes, the one with the man who I say is a villain."

"And yet, she should not be one to be with such a man."

"She cannot, does not know him as he is."

"Ah! you think he is sailing under false colors?"

"Beyond all doubt."

"And who is she, Nat?"

"Miss Maybel Kingdon, the daughter of Millionaire Kingdon, the banker."

"Yes, I have heard of her, and that she and her brother are the banker's only heirs."

"Yes, and Craig Kingdon, her brother, lives a very fast life, I have heard, though I have never seen him."

"But what must they all have thought of your leaving as you did?"

"I do not know. I saw in the papers that Miss Kingdon had driven her rescuer to her home, fearing he was fatally wounded, but that he had modestly departed, giving no clue to his identity."

"That was all that was said about it, but I am sorry to see her now with a man who I am sure is a scoundrel; and more, Sis, I will prove him to be, for I know his face, and yet, when and where I have seen it I cannot now recall," was New York Nat's determined reply to his sister and ally in Secret Service work.

CHAPTER II.

CONVICT PALS.

"SAY, pard; I knows you."

The man who uttered the words spoke in a low tone, and addressed one who sat at the small table with him listening to the Garden Concert which New York Nat and his sister Olive had also attended, and where the former had recognized Maybel Kingdon, whose life he had saved, accompanied by a gentleman whom Nat had denounced.

The man who heard the words that open this chapter, started, turned livid in the glare of the electric lights, and, dropping his hand upon an ugly knife he carried, leant forward and hissed forth:

"Waal, ter know me is worth your life, so jist git up and come with me, or I'll knife yer before all this gang."

"I says come, and don't yer breathe or look suspicious."

"Don't git excited, pal, for I is one o' your kind," said the other in an unmoved way.

"What does yer mean?"

"I says I knows yer."

"And I says it's as much as yer life is worth ter do so."

"Yer is Killer Bill."

"I want ter know more."

"You was in for life for murder, escaped, got into another killin' scrape and was tuk back, and yer escaped three months ago ag'in, though yer had to kill ther guard ter do so."

"Who is you, I asks?" and the man called Killer Bill grasped his knife more firmly, though about him was a crowd of several thousand people listening to the playing of the band.

He and his comrade sat slightly apart in the shadow of a tree, and before him was a half-finished glass of beer and a sandwich.

"I war in Cell Twenty-Seven at the prison."

"Lordy! you are Zip Ralston."

"I am."

The man stretched his hand across the table and said:

"Shake! we are Convict Pals, and there is a price on our heads."

"Yes, and a big one."

"How did you git away?"

"I was watcher over a dead chum, and took his place in the coffin."

"When they took me out to bury me I rose from the dead and skipped!"

"You bet you scared them as was totin' you."

"They hain't done runnin' yit," and both men laughed.

"Yes, I recognizes you now, though I think yer is rigged up out o' yer condition."

"As you is, for you is togged out like a gent."

"Yas, I has ter be ter throw the ferrets off my trail, and you gave me a scare, when you said you know'd me."

"What are you doing here?"

"Pocket lifting."

"What is your game, Zip?"

"About ther same."

"How's business?"

"Good."

"The same with me; but where does you hang out?"

"I has a job in a store I intends to strike big some night."

"I'm with you, and you go pards with me?"

"What's yer racket?"

"Gold and revenge!" was the decided response.

"Whose done yer that yer wishes ter knife him?"

"Does yer see that young fellow sittin' over thar?"

"The one with ther pretty gal?"

"Yes. Well, he's a detective."

"The deuce you say!"

"Yas, he's ther one that kilt my pard, Red Fred, and sent me back to live in a stone grave."

"That boy?"

"The same."

"You recognize him then?"

"Well, I'll tell you that the papers says I was run down and Fred kilt by some unknown detective, the authorities either did not know, or kept out of sight for reasons."

"But, that's the one that pinked Red Fred and got me, and now I'm goin' to git even."

"I don't blame yer, and I'll help yer, for if he works as an Unknown he is more to be dreaded than an out and out detective or cop."

"You bet he is! and, young though he be, he's got sand and nerve for half a dozen men."

"He and the gal seems ter be keepin' their eyes on the handsome gent and lady over yonder."

"I know them, too."

"You has stylish acquaintances, Bill."

"You bet I has! and I means ter use 'em. Just bet on that, too!"

"Who is they?"

"The lady is the darter of the rick banker, Kingdon, what lives in a palis on one of the swell streets here, and the gent is her lover, and it is going to cost him sumthin' now I is out o' ther grave."

"You has a pull on him then?"

"Waal I just has! But, see here, Zip; I is glad I met yer, for we can work together and make money."

"You bet we can."

"Remember, I has first to track that young ferret, for he's to be my game for revenge, and then we kin go into business together."

"I'm with yer, Killer Bill."

"Drop my Christian name, Zip, and jist call me Bill, see?"

"And more—I must change my make-up a trifle as you recognized me."

"Well, I first seen that yer middle finger on yer left hand were gone; and then when you looked straight at me it brought back to my mind Cell No. Thirty-Two at the prison, so I spoke to you and yer actions and voice convinced me."

"Yes, I must be more careful, and as the finger won't grow out ag'in, like a crab's claw, I'll jist wear a glove on this hand and stuff the finger out."

"But the young ferret and gal is goin', so let us git on their track," and the two Convict Pals arose and followed New York Nat and Olive away from the Concert Garden.

CHAPTER III.

TOO FLY FOR THEM.

"OLIVE, we are shadowed," said New York Nat, before his sister and himself had gone very far from the garden concert.

"Why, Nat, what makes you think so?"

"I saw two men watching us at the garden, and after telling you that I recognized the one with Miss Kingdon, but could not place him, I did not wish to say the same of another but, such was the case."

"Why, Nat, you will begin to believe you are haunted, after awhile. I fear you are working too hard in your detective business, and you should do as I did—should run off for a vacation," said Olive.

"Oh no, I do not need a vacation until I have accomplished the aim of my life, by our deeds of Secret Service to win a place for my Boy Police, and a fortune too."

"But, I tell you, Olive, I saw those two men watching us, and one of them I have seen under some peculiar circumstances, but cannot place him now."

"When we left they arose and followed us. Now, when we cross the street look for yourself and see that two men are coming on after us."

"Does that mean we are being shadowed, Nat?"

"In this case it does, Sis."

"Well, Nat, you are seldom wrong," said Olive, and crossing the street she glanced back at the two men.

They passed under a gas light as she looked at them, and she said:

"Yes, Nat, I remember seeing the same two men at a table near us."

"Are they the inspector's detectives, do you think, trying to find out who the Unknown Ferrets are?"

"It may be, for the chief has vowed to our allies, Mr. Vanderlip and Mr. Sherman Canfield, that he will yet track us, and he has a bet with the former of a thousand dollars that he will do so."

"And may win it."

"Not if we can help it, Olive. But, we must throw those fellows off our track, for it would never do to take you home and have those men dog us there."

"How can we get rid of them?"

"We'll go into the ladies' entrance of the Barrett House. I will then leave you in the parlor, quickly change my disguise in the ante-room, and go to the office and order a carriage for you to drive home, while I will shadow those men, for turn about is fair play."

This plan was adopted, and, as Olive went into the parlors, New York Nat quickly passed into the waiting-room, and with a cleverness and skill gained by long practice, in a couple of minutes had completely changed his appearance.

In the first place, his coat was turned, and was of a different color on the other side; his turned-down collar was changed to a standing up one, with a white cravat, and pocketing the soft hat he wore, he took out from under his belt a spring opera hat, that with a pair of eyeglasses set upon his nose, and a blond wig, made a totally different person in appearance from the youth whom Killer Bill had recognized.

Going down to the office he asked the clerk to order a carriage for a lady in the parlor, whom he could not escort home owing to an engagement he must keep at that hour.

Then he passed on out of the hotel within five feet of Killer Bill who had never for an instant recognized him.

As he suspected, he passed the other pal watching the ladies' entrance of the hotel, and, apparently waiting for a car, he saw a carriage drive up and a veiled lady come out and enter it, passing the shadower who failed also to recognize that Olive had thrown a black veil over her bonnet and a shawl about her shoulders, for the fair young Queen of the Ferrets, like her brother, was too clever to go out without being able also to disguise herself in an instant.

New York Nat witnessed his sister's departure, and walking toward the watcher as the carriage rolled away he said in a drawling tone:

"Say, friend, I take it that you are a detective."

Zip Ralston started, but said with as much composure as he could assume:

"Well, if you think so, you will know enough not to trifle with me when I am at work."

"Very true; but your comrade, who just went into the hotel, told me to come and say you were not to wait for him, and he'd see you later."

"No he won't! He can't come that game on me, for he knows I don't know where to find him, and he's trying to give me the shake, fearing I may squeal, but, that game don't work," and the man in his anger, and fearing to be deserted by his fellow convict, forgot that he was saying more than was safe. He was, however, quickly recalled to his senses by having a revolver muzzle thrust into his face and hearing the words:

"Well, this game does work, for I am a detective, and I want you, my man."

CHAPTER IV.

NAT'S SUSPICION VERIFIED.

THE escaped convict was startled beyond resistance or speech.

He saw the cell of his prison looming up before him, and where he was to spend the remaining years of his existence, for he was sentenced for life.

In his terror and despair he made no resistance, and the handcuffs were quickly snapped upon his wrists by New York Nat.

But there was heard a rapid step behind him, a stunning blow of a cane crushed down upon Nat's head and as he tottered and fell backward against the iron rail of the hotel, the one who had struck him made a savage thrust at him with a long-bladed knife.

Unable to resist, dazed as he was by the blow, New York Nat saw the thrust made and turned his body to avoid it. The point struck a hard substance, glanced, and cut the flesh as it slipped from rib to rib, while the intended murderer, believing that he had finished his work, grasped his fellow-convict by the arm and the two fled rapidly up the street as their victim sunk to the pavement, just as a gentleman came out of the hotel, saw him and said:

"Sorry liquor has downed you, my friend; but I will call a hack for you, as the street is not a pleasant sleeping-place."

"Mr. Canfield, I am not drunk. I am—"

"New York Nat as I live, and in disguise?" cried the gentleman.

"Yes, but do not mind me, sir, for I am only stunned by a blow. See those two men, please follow them, for I can look after myself, thank you."

Sherman Canfield saw the retreating forms just going around the corner and turn down Fifth avenue.

He waited no longer, but hastening around in front of the hotel, sprung into a waiting cab and gave the coachman his orders quickly, and the vehicle dashed away, while he muttered:

"I have never tried scouting and trailing in the city, but I'll try my hand at it now."

New York Nat with an effort straightened himself up as Mr. Canfield dashed away, and muttered:

"If any one can catch those two fellows, that young Indian-fighter is the one."

Then he took off his crushed hat and felt his head.

There was a large lump where the cane had fallen.

"The springs in this opera hat and my wig saved me from a broken skull," he muttered.

Then he placed his hand in his coat and found that it was wet.

*Sherman Canfield, of Nebraska, and a well-known young plainsman, at present the private secretary of Colonel W. F. Cody. —THE AUTHOR.

"It's blood, but I guess I'm not badly hurt."

"It was the Boy Police badge I wear that turned the blade, and it glanced along my ribs."

"Both were close calls, and I'll look up a doctor, for I feel quite shaky."

"Anyhow, I know now that those are bad fellows, who need running down."

"I must take off my wig before I go to the doctor," and he did so, removing also his glasses, and then making his way to a physician he had before visited, and who knew him simply as a young detective whose injuries he had dressed before, for in his many daring and dangerous encounters with crooks Nat had often received wounds more or less serious.

Doctor Bailey answered the ring himself, not having retired, and when he had looked at the wound on the head said:

"Well, my young ferret, that opera hat saved you from perhaps death."

"Yes, sir."

"As it is the blow is not serious, and a few applications of this wash will soon reduce the swelling."

"I've got another for you to look at, doctor, and I suppose it is worse than this one."

He threw open his vest as he spoke and after a quick examination of the wound the doctor said:

"Yes, the knife was driven for your heart and glanced on some hard substance."

"Yes, sir, my badge."

"Then cut along the ribs, but fortunately the wounds are slight."

"You had better remain here all night."

"No, thank you, sir, just patch me up and I will go home."

"Who caused these wounds?"

"A man whom I had arrested had a pal whose approach I did not see, so he struck me, then knifed me, and both got away."

The doctor asked no more and Nat said:

"Please do not report this, doctor, as publicity may thwart work I have on hand."

"As you please," was the answer of the doctor as his hand closed over the liberal fee given him by New York Nat, who then took his departure.

He paused upon reaching the pavement and then said:

"I'll risk it."

With this he went to a fashionable street not far away and, seeing a light burning in the hallway ascended the steps and placing a night key in the lock entered.

He passed through the hall into a rear room that was a handsome library, luxuriously furnished, and where a light burned.

Seating himself in an easy-chair he leant back and and soon dropped to sleep, to awake an hour after as a gentleman entered the room and said:

"Hello, Nat, you here?"

"I am indeed glad of it, for I have your man."

The gentleman was Sherman Canfield, and his appearance was that of one who had had a severe struggle.

"You have my man, sir?" cried Nat springing to his feet in delight, and then placing his hand upon his side as his wound gave him a severe twinge of pain.

"Yes, I took a hack, passed them on Fifth avenue, and then leaving the cab shadowed them, as you call it, and they led me to one of the lowest parts of the city, not very far from the Five Points."

"Then I was right in my suspicion, sir, that they are the worst kind of crooks," said Nat emphatically.

CHAPTER V.

THE FRONTIER SHADOWER.

"Yes, if they are not the crookedest of crooks, I'll be greatly mistaken, in fact their attack on you proves that," said Mr. Canfield.

"But they did not attack me, Mr. Canfield, for I was dogging them, caught them apart and arrested one, and his pal rescued him."

"So you got one of them, sir?"

"Yes, the man with your steel bracelets on his wrists."

"You have done splendidly, Mr. Canfield; but where is the other one?"

"That I don't know, but this one, I suppose, can be made to tell."

"Where is he, sir?"

"Out in the hack, and the cabman is standing guard over him, for I drove home just to change my rig and then take him to jail as the prisoner of the Unknown Ferrets of the Secret Service Chief."

"You see I am slightly disfigured, but still in the ring," and Sherman Canfield laughed as he pointed to his torn collar and clothes, not to speak of a slight cut on his cheek.

"He fought you then, sir?"

"Like a catamount."

"I am glad I came here, sir, for had you given him up to the chief he might have told enough about me so that there would be no longer a secret as to who were the inspector's Unknown Ferrets."

"I am indeed glad then that you headed me off here, Nat."

"But you did splendidly, Mr. Canfield, in running the fellow down, and would make a first class detective."

"I am glad to know it, if other schemes of mine fail, Nat."

"I never took a trail in the city before, but my plains experience helped me."

"How did you do it, sir?"

"I just kept the two men in sight without letting them know they were followed."

"At times I took chances by heading them off, but luck came my way and the result was that they led me to a locality where it was most dangerous for a well-dressed man to be seen."

"But they halted at a dive, a perfect old rookery, where I had stepped into the shadow to see them go by."

"But it seemed that one of them lived here, and I overheard the other one ask just where his room was and say that he would go to his quarters and get some files and come back and remove his handcuffs."

"I'll wait here, Bill, and take you up with me," said the man in irons, and the other started off at a rapid pace.

"Then I decided to show my hand, and pretending to be drunk and to have lost my way, I stepped out of my hiding-place, and he, seeing my condition did not step back into the shadow."

"I asked him if he wanted to make a stake by guiding me to where I could get a hack, and he said he would if I paid in advance."

"Of course, I divined his motive, to rob me, for he thought I was very drunk, and saw my diamond stud and watch-chain, so I was prepared for him when I took out a roll of bills."

"He, with his manacled hands, grabbed me by the throat, and at once it became a fight for mastery, for he is a very powerful man."

"But, I had the advantage, of course, and as I cannot yet get over the habit of carrying a small revolver, I had him subdued after a fierce fight of it, and I showed him to a hack and brought him here."

"I'll go and fetch him in, Nat; but tell me, were you much hurt?"

"Under the circumstances, no, sir, for I got off well; but Mr. Vanderlip will be delighted to know that he left in his stead, when he was called West, an ally for the Boy Police League, who can run in New York crooks as well as he can, and I sincerely thank you, Mr. Canfield, for the services you have rendered me."

"Don't speak of it, my boy, for my old plains pard, Walter Vanderlip, asked me

to be the master of his home in his absence, and, as you know, to act for him as your ally, and I have done so with real pleasure, and candidly, you and your wonderful Secret Service work has made time pass pleasantly with me."

"But I heard from Vanderlip to-day, and he writes that he hopes the chief has not yet been able to find out who his Unknown Ferret is, as, in your own good time you will make it known."

"He also says that he hopes to return within a month; but now for the prisoner," and Sherman Canfield went out to the carriage and soon returned with Zip Ralston the escaped convict."

The man looked even more used up in appearance than did Sherman Canfield, for he bore the marks of the young Nebraskan's knuckles in his face, and finger-marks upon his throat, while in his struggle the steel manacles had cut his wrists until they bled."

"This is your man, is it not, Nat?" asked Sherman Canfield, as he entered the library where New York Nat sat perfectly at home, for his Arizona ally had given him a pass-key to enter at all hours that he found need to do so."

"Yes, sir, that is my man, and his life depends upon what he knows," was Nat's stern reply."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOY FERRET'S PRISONER.

THE prisoner taken by Sherman Canfield heard the words of New York Nat with evident terror."

He cast a quick glance at the young detective, but as the wig and spectacles had been removed and the coat turned again, he did not see in him the one who had arrested him near the Barrett House."

But he did recognize the youth whom Killer Bill had pointed out to him at the garden concert, and the two had followed."

Still he did not connect Nat at the concert, and Nat who arrested him as one and the same."

"So I owe this to you, does I?"

"Killer Bill said as how he know'd you as the one who had pricked his pal and sent him back to jail," and the man glared savagely at the young detective."

Nat laughed and replied:

"See here, my man, your tongue runs away with your brains, for you have told me just who the man is whose face, disguised as it was, I could not recall."

"So your comrade was Killer Bill, eh?"

"No, I was joking," and the man felt that he had said too much."

"Well I am in deadly earnest, and I tell you that the face of your pal comes back to me now, and I remember that he again escaped from prison."

"The next time he will not be so fortunate."

"I says it wasn't Bill."

"Very well, I know that it was; but who are you?"

"Nobody you knows."

"Maybe you'll be known at Secret Service Headquarters."

"No I won't."

"I'll wager big money your picture is in the rogues' gallery, and as Killer Bill was your pal it condemns you."

"I demands my freedom, for you has no warrant for arrestin' me."

"I have the warrant of knowing you to be a villain, or rather this gentleman had."

"You and your pal shadowed me from the garden, and yet were not so clever but that I fooled you; but now you are to go with me."

"Where?"

"Wherever I please to take you, and you shall go wholly at my mercy," and New York Nat took from his pocket a gag he

carried with him and forced it into the man's mouth, Sherman Canfield holding the prisoner securely in his strong grasp until he was properly gagged."

Then his hands were secured, manacled as they were, to his waist, and the young detective said:

"Now we will go."

"One moment please, Nat," and Sherman Canfield called the young ferret chief to one side and said:

"See here, Nat, you are badly off and suffering as I can see, so remain here to-night and I can take care of your prisoner also."

"Thank you, Mr. Canfield, but I must go to night."

"Where will you take him?"

"To my quarters, sir."

"Then I will go with you, for you shall not go alone with this man injured as you really are."

"Mr. Canfield, Mr. Vanderlip even does not know my quarters, for he has never been there."

"Only Olive, our Ferret Queen, and my sister as you know, with the members of our League of Boy Police know the hiding-place of the band."

"Well, I do not seek to pry, Nat, but I will go with you as far as you care to have me go."

"Mr. Canfield, go all the way, as I see that you are determined, for I trust you, sir, and it is useless for me to say that I consider you bound to secrecy as thoroughly as one of my own allies."

"Certainly, and I so pledge myself."

"Just wait until I partially change my toilet," and in five minutes Sherman Canfield returned to the library, and with Nat and the prisoner left the house."

The carriage was waiting outside, and in a whisper Nat told Mr. Canfield where to have the cabman drive, and to push right along."

When they entered the vehicle Nat completely blindfolded his prisoner, and for a long while not a word was spoken by any one, the captured convict being gagged of course kept silent."

It was a long drive, and nearly an hour passed before the hackman drew rein in the upper part of the city which was very sparsely settled."

Here the trio got out and Sherman Canfield bade the hackman await his return, telling him he could take a nap meanwhile."

Then he followed Nat with his still blindfolded prisoner."

After quite a walk they came to a wall surrounding a large old mansion built in the last century, and surrounded by extensive grounds completely overgrown with foliage and underbrush."

The prisoner was helped over the wall, Nat leading the way and guiding him by holding to his arm."

But Nat led the way without hesitation to the rear of the old mansion so dark, grim and weird in its intense solitude though within the city limits, and halted at a rear door leading into the basement."

A key opened the door, and Nat closing it behind them, struck a match and lighted a lamp that was there."

Sherman Canfield, in spite of his nerve, shuddered at the gloomy surroundings, but silently followed his young leader up two flights of stairs, when for the first time he discovered that they were followed by an enormous dog as savage-looking as a tiger, but which had made no demonstration toward himself or the prisoner, the presence of Nat controlling him perfectly."

Upon the top floor they entered a room where there were several cots, and New York Nat said quietly:

"Now, prisoner: you are in prison again, and from the sentinel over you there is no escape," and he looked significantly at the dog."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HAUNT OF THE FERRETS.

SHERMAN CANFIELD had looked on in silent wonder as they entered the weird abode of the Boy Ferret's captain, New York Nat.

He noted that the old house seemed not to have held an occupant for many long years, and though furnished, its furniture was worn, faded and moth-eaten.

In the room on the top floor where the cots were, he saw that there was but one door, no windows, only a skylight in the center for light and air.

As they came through the grounds he had discovered that in the rear of the mansion was a cemetery, a burying-ground long since abandoned, and this added to the gruesomeness of the old rookery.

Having taken the blindfold off the prisoner's eyes, and removed the gag from his mouth, New York Nat said:

"Take your choice of a cot, my man, and turn it.

"This dog will guard you, and I advise you not to try any monkey business with him, for he won't stand it.

"You need not be afraid of ghosts, for I have never seen any here, and I shall be within call," and motioning to Sherman Canfield to follow, and leaving the prisoner in the dark, New York Nat said:

"This is my house, Mr. Canfield, and I sleep here alone, the dog my only companion, while I take my meals at the cottage where my sister boards, or wherever else I happen to be when I get hungry.

"Here we hold our councils, the Boy Police assembling on certain nights, and I shall call a special meeting for to-morrow night to set my boys on the track of that man's pal, after we have gotten from him all the information we can force out of him.

"Will you sit down, sir, or are you anxious to return?" and Nat ushered Sherman Canfield into his own private room, which was fairly comfortable.

"No, I will return, for the hackman is waiting you know; but you are a plucky fellow, Nat, to stay in this dreary place, for though I do not believe in ghosts it is the most gruesome spot I ever saw."

"The folks say it is haunted, sir, and give it a wide berth by day and night, while even the detectives and police do not come here, but so much the better for me as no one disturbs me.

"I will go with you to your carriage, sir, as you could not find your way out of the grounds—see, this is our council room, and here we will bring the prisoner to-morrow night to make him talk," and Nat opened the door of a large room where a number of seats were arranged in a semicircle around a table behind which were two chairs.

Sherman Canfield gazed with interest upon all he saw and then followed the young ferret back down the stairs to the cellar.

The lamp was left burning, but Nat locked the door behind him and the young Nebraskan gave a sigh of relief as he found himself out in the open air.

"Is not that a cemetery, Nat?"

"Yes, sir; don't the tombs look like ghosts prowling about?"

"They do indeed."

"No one has been buried there for many years, and I had my quarters in a vault there, before I took up my home in the old mansion.

"I believe you know, Mr. Canfield, that I was under a cloud for a crime I had not committed, and of course, boy-like, I long supposed the police were on my track, so went into hiding, and it was then that I learned so much of criminals and their deeds, and determined some day to turn detective and hunt them down.

"My sister Olive was my ally, and so I gathered about my boys like myself who were not intentionally wicked, and we be-

gan to run crooks down, inform the chief of police of crimes we knew were committed or about to be, and so, from keeping our secret became the Unknown Ferrets that you, through Mr. Vanderlip, knew us as, and many a reward does the chief hold to our credit to-day; but here we are, sir, at the wall, and by following this street you will find your carriage.

"I would go with you, only I do not feel very bright to-night."

"I should think not after all you have gone through with, Nat; but I have trailed trackless prairies too much to miss my way.

"Good-night, and be sure and come to see me to-morrow, for I shall be most anxious about you."

Nat promised, and then seeing the form of Sherman Canfield disappear in the darkness, started upon his return to the old mansion.

He let himself in as before, took up his lamp and ascending to the upper floor looked in upon his prisoner.

He was lying upon one of the cots, and the dog was not far from him on duty.

"See here, young feller, a man would die of horrors in this old ghost nest, and with this devil's cub a-watchin' me," said the prisoner.

"Oh no, there is no danger.

"I'll see you in the morning and bring you your breakfast, but it will be late, as it is now three o'clock, and I need rest.

"Don't look for ghosts, and if you don't attempt to walk off, the dog won't worry you.

"Good-night," and New York Nat went to his own room across the hall.

His head pained him and the cut across his ribs felt very sore, so that he was anxious to go to bed, and it was but a few minutes before he was sleeping soundly, no dread of ghosts haunting his dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONVICT AT BAY.

It was after nine o'clock when New York Nat awoke the next morning, and he felt stiff and sore after his rough handling of the night before.

But he congratulated himself in his philosophical way that it was no worse, and dressing himself went in to see his prisoner.

Zip Ralston looked as though he had passed a sleepless night of it, and he lay upon his cot scarcely daring to move, for an attempt to get up at daylight had brought a warning growl from his sentinel, and the showing of a double row of very savage-looking teeth.

"For God's sake take that ugly brute away," said the convict, as Nat entered.

"Ah, the dog is all right, but how are you this morning?"

"Morning?"

"It's about four o'clock in the day is it not?"

Nat looked at his watch and replied:

"Just half-past nine.

"I will bring you some breakfast within an hour, and a good one, for I have no wish to starve you or treat you badly."

"Where am I?"

"In prison."

"It's a queer prison this."

"It is a safe one, as you will find out.

"I will leave the dog just outside of the door, to please you; but as I told you last night he is not fond of monkey business."

"There's no monkey in me now, I bet you; but this place is haunted or I am a liar."

"Yes, folks say so.

"Did you see any ghosts last night?"

"No, but I heard 'em.

"They was scared of the dog."

Nat laughed and said:

"Well, there are a lot of ghosts that haunt

this place, but they are friendly enough to me, and are my allies.

"I'll be back as soon as possible," and he left the prisoner, taking the dog out with him.

But the latter was placed at the outside of the door while Nat went on down-stairs and out into the yard.

He went to the wall, watched his chance, when he saw no one about, and leaped over into the street.

Quickly he wended his way for the distance of half a mile over toward the Hudson River, and there upon the bluff, commanding a fine view, was the cozy cottage of Widow Herbert, who dwelt there with her two children and Olive, the Ferret Queen, as a boarder.

The cottage was isolated and a pleasant little home, and New York Nat had a claim upon the widow as binding as the strongest kindred ties, for he had one day saved the lives of her two children, who capsized in a boat on the river.

Olive was seated upon the piazza and as Nat approached met him at the gate, while she said:

"I was growing anxious about you, Nat, as I did not know but that you had gotten into trouble with those two men."

"I did, Olive, for I have a knock on the head and a gash on the ribs to show for it; but I went to Doctor Bailey and he dressed me up all right, and now I am here for breakfast, and I want it for two for I have a guest."

"Oh, Nat, who have you brought here?" cried Olive in alarm.

"No one here, Sis, but in the Haunted House he is."

"Who is he?"

"One of the two gentlemen who were shadowing us last night; and Mr. Vanderlip's western friend, and our new ally, Mr. Sherman Canfield, helped me out of a very ugly scrape last night, for they meant to kill me," and when Olive had told Mrs. Herbert that Nat was there for breakfast, and wished an extra one to take with him, she came back and heard the story of his adventures.

Then he said:

"Now, Olive, I am going to be lazy to-day and rest, so I wish you to go the rounds and post the boys of a special meeting to-night, and you can come over early with dinner for two."

"That is right, Nat, and take all the rest you can, and I will see the boys and give notice for to-night," answered Olive.

Half an hour after Nat had finished his breakfast and with a basket containing all that was needed for the prisoner he returned to the old rookery.

He found the dog as he had left him at the door, and the prisoner much relieved by not having him constantly before his eyes.

There was a well in the kitchen, and taking the man a bucket of water for him to make his toilet, Nat then unlocked his handcuffs and set his breakfast before him.

The moment he left the room Zip Ralston decided upon escape.

His arms were free, and he had a fork as a weapon.

He would wait at the door for the boy's return, strike the fork deep into his neck and then be ready for the dog.

Hastily he ate his breakfast and then stood ready at the door, just behind it, his face white, determined and merciless, as he stood at bay.

CHAPTER IX.

CLOSE CALLS FROM DEATH.

As has been stated there was no window in the room, it being an interior one on the attic, and adjoining the large assembly room referred to where the Boy Police held their meetings.

There were skylights in each room, giving light and air through the roof, and the ceilings were high; but the convict prisoner had seen a chance to escape if he turned at bay and killed the young detective.

He saw that there were three cots in the room, a table and several chairs, and these stood on end would carry him up along the wall to the skylight, and over on the roof there must be some chance of escape, he thought.

By killing Nat he would get his weapons, and a shot would end the dog.

So he argued, and also that he could close the door quick enough to prevent the dog from entering after Nat.

The chances of escape seemed in his favor, and he determined to make the attempt.

So it was that he stood at bay, waiting for the youth to enter, his fork in one hand, his manacles, to be used as a weapon in the other.

He could hear his heart beating as he waited, for liberty meant everything to him, and he gave a startled cry as suddenly from over his head came the words:

"So that is your game, is it, my fine fellow?"

"I suspected as much."

He uttered a groan as he beheld Nat peering down at him through the open skylight and covering him with a revolver.

"Curse you, some day I'll get even with you," growled the man.

"All right, when your chance comes take it; but it is my inning now, so drop the irons and fork, and lie flat on your face."

"I won't, and you don't dare shoot me."

"Well, I'll call the dog to interview you."

"He can't get in, for the door is bolted," said the convict triumphantly.

"Is it? let us see," and New York Nat gave a loud whistle and then a call.

There was a growl, a terrible pawing at the door, a heavy thud and the man cried wildly:

"For God's sake don't call him any more, or he'll break in the door!"

"Drop those irons and that fork then!"

They were thrown across the room, but just then the door with a terrible shaking went in, for the weight of the huge dog had torn off the catch of the bolt.

Half way across the room reached the dog with the force of his impetus, and the man gave a shriek of fright, but from above came the stern command of Nat to the enraged brute.

But he was maddened now with the resistance of the bolt and glared around for the convict who had sprung to shelter behind the door.

That he meant to spring upon the man was beyond all doubt and this New York Nat knew, so, without hesitation he forced himself through the skylight, held a second by his hands and dropped to the floor.

It was a long drop, but he was as agile as a cat and caught himself on his feet, though slightly shocked by the fall.

He was just in time, for the big brute had ferreted out the hiding-place of his prisoner and was making for him when New York Nat sprung between him and his intended victim.

A sharp blow and stern commands barely checked the dog in his onslaught, and with a low growl he went to the door and lay down there as ordered to do by Nat.

"Now, sir, you see that you had a very close call, for had I taken time to come down here by way of the cupola stairs, as I went up, I would have found only your well-picked bones to greet me, for that dog makes a meal off of a man your size when he is good and hungry."

"I told you I'd give up and not to call him," whined the convict.

"You were not quite brisk enough, my friend, and you have only yourself to blame,

for I told you there was no monkeying with the sentinel allowed."

"I've had a lesson."

"Take it to heart, and see that it does not occur again."

"I half suspected you would play a game of that kind, and so went up to inspect, and it was fortunate for myself that I did, though the dog would have chewed you to ribbons had you killed me, or the masked jury would have quickly sentenced you to death."

"The masked jury?"

"That's what I said."

"What's that?"

"You'll find out later, when you have to answer for your double attempt on my life."

"Oh, Lord!"

"What kind of a place am I at?"

"Wait and see," and with a few words of parting advice, having again put the man in irons, and after giving Sentinel his breakfast, left him again on guard, New York Nat went to his room to lie quiet for the day, for his injuries demanded it.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

WHEN New York Nat had left the cottage on his return to the old mansion, Olive set about her preparations to go down-town upon her mission of calling a special meeting of the Boy Police.

Though the Queen of the Ferrets, their secretary and treasurer, Olive was not known to one of them as far as having seen her face went, for she was always masked at the meeting, and her brother alone knew her as she was or her place of abode.

Nat was determined that Olive should never be recognized in after years by any of the band as one who had been the Ferret Queen, and hence it was that he always insisted that his sister should be masked.

Now, as she had to visit the members of the band to warn them, Olive selected as her attire, from among the numerous dresses she wore as disguises, a deep mourning garb with thick black veil, and such a costume as might be worn by a widow, or a woman of forty.

She took the Elevated Railroad down to Forty-second street and then left it, going to one of the fashionable hotels near.

At the ladies' entrance she asked to see one of the bell-boys who answered to the name of "Flip."

The bell-boy, a fine-looking youth, noted for his inquiring mind and "freshness," came into the parlor greatly surprised at being sent for by a lady.

"There is a special meeting at the mansion to night, Flip, so post those whom it is your duty to inform," said Olive.

"Lordy! it's the Queen."

"Yes, and you understand?"

"You bet I do understand when our Queen speaks, and I'll post 'em."

"But how you did scare me," and Flip seemed most anxious to penetrate the thick black veil and see the beautiful face beneath.

But he looked in vain, and said:

"Can't I get you a glass of lemonade from the bar, miss?"

"Thank you, no, Flip," and Olive turned away, reading Flip's hope that she would accept his offer for a lemonade and have to raise her veil to drink it.

"Anything wrong with the chief, miss?"

"Nothing serious, Flip, as you will discover at the meeting to-night," and Olive left the hotel while Flip muttered:

"Now we are one mystery to the Secret Service chief and the police, but our Queen is just as big a mystery to us boys of the League: but if she don't want to show her face it's her business, I suppose."

From the hotel Olive made her way to a District Messenger Office, glanced over the youths in uniform awaiting there, and said to the clerk:

"There is a boy I wish to send on a message, as he knows just where to go."

The youth in question was called, his time and number taken, and the price paid by Olive, who handed him an envelope and said:

"Take that to the address and notify those on your beat."

The youth darted out of the door, then glanced at the envelope and read:

"TEASER:—

"A special meeting at Den to-night.

"Notify those on your list.

"Important.

"QUEEN."

Teaser looked around with surprise, and said:

"It was the Queen or my name's not Teaser."

"Wonder if anything's wrong with Cap'n Nat."

"Hope not, for if so, it would bu'st up our band sure."

He looked about for the Ferret Queen but she had disappeared, and his time having been paid for three hours, he went on his rounds of notifying the boys whom it was his duty to post of the meeting.

A telegraph office was next visited by the Ferret Queen, and Parson, an employee there, was notified when he came forward, having been told that a lady wished to speak to him.

As with the others, his first query was if accident had befallen their young chief.

A news-stand down-town was the fourth place visited by the Queen, and after making a purchase of a magazine and several papers, she said to the young agent:

"There is a special meeting to-night, Freckles."

The youth started, gazed at the mask-like veil and gave a low whistle while he said in an undertone:

"You are the Queen?"

"Yes."

"And Cap'n Nat?"

"You will see him to-night."

"The meeting is most important, so post your men and don't fail," and Olive turned away.

Soon after she stopped a newsboy on the street selling evening papers, and buying one said:

"Fatty, come to a special to-night, for it is important."

"Oh Lordy! how you scart me, Queen—is ther cap'n dead that yer wears black mourn-in'?"

"No, Fatty, Captain Nat is all right; but tell your boys and be on hand without fail."

"You bet what you says goes, miss—Here's yer Evenin' Pos'—Tel'gram—Wur-ruld—las' edition," yelled Fatty, and he went on his way, unblushingly selling the first edition for the last, while he made a mistake in a patron's change, in his own favor, however, from keeping his eyes fixed upon the receding form in black and veiled face of the one whom he knew to be the Queen of the Boy Police.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASKED JURY.

QUEEN OLIVE went rapidly upon her rounds, and informed all of those who were to be readily found, and who had lists of others to post when a special meeting of the Boy Police was called.

She returned late in the afternoon to the cottage to find that Mrs. Herbert had a good dinner ready, and after enjoying it she carried a well-filled basket for Nat, the prisoner, and the dog, Sentinel, who was never forgotten.

It was nearly sunset when she slipped over the wall into the grounds, and reaching the

mansion she let herself into the cellar with her own key.

Sentinel, as the band had unanimously rechristened the dog, was not there to meet her.

He had other business up-stairs just then, but when not otherwise engaged always caught the first sound of unlocking the cellar door and down-stairs he would fly to meet whatever was coming into the mansion.

He knew each one of the band by sight, if not by name, and woe would it have been for one who had attempted to enter under false colors.

In his disguises Nat had to be very careful to speak upon opening the door.

Noiselessly up-stairs Queen tripped to the upper floor, the sun's last rays lighting up the interior.

As her head was level with the top floor in ascending the stairs, she saw a man's form creep out of the lodge-room and cross the hall toward Nat's room, and in his manacled hands he grasped a piece of wood, resembling the leg of a chair.

She could have called out, but did not, for she feared that Sentinel was only sleeping and might rush out and tear the prisoner to pieces.

But where was Nat? What did that leg of a chair in the prisoner's hands mean?

Had he killed the dog with it?

Was he now going to kill Nat?

Or, had he already done so and was seeking to escape?

Such questions flashed like lightning through the brain of the Ferret Queen.

When she went to the old mansion, day or night, she always went armed, and quickly was the basket set down and her revolver taken from her pocket.

A moment more and she was on the track of the prisoner.

He was in the light from a hall skylight in the roof, she in the shadow.

She saw him gently turn the knob and open the door and she closed up the gap between them.

He had not dared close the door behind him, for there lay the victim he sought upon his bed fast asleep.

A step or two softly taken brought him almost within striking distance, but the club dropped from his hands in terror as he heard behind him in a low, hoarse voice:

"Hands up, or I will kill you!"

The words and the fall of the leg of the chair from the man's manacled hands caused Nat to spring from the bed wide awake, and he was one to awaken on the instant and for business.

He threw himself upon the prisoner who at once called loudly for mercy.

The windows in the room were completely closed at night by heavy curtains, to prevent a ray of light from being seen without, but by day they were partly drawn, so that New York Nat recognized in a second that his prisoner had attempted to kill him, and he had been saved by the coming of his sister, who stood, still covering the man as he clasped his ironed hands and begged the youth not to hurt him.

"I will not hurt you, no, for you are at my mercy; but again you have attempted my life and there is another count against you in the trial by the masked jury to-night," said Nat, and turning to Olive he continued:

"Tell me about it, Sis, and—where is Sentinel?"

He gave a call but there was no response of running feet, and the man cried in fright:

"He is not dead."

"I did not kill him, only gave him some morphine on a piece of meat left from my breakfast—it was not enough to kill him, I swear it."

"Woe be unto you if that dog is dead," and Nat hastened into the prisoner's room

where he found Sentinel stretched out upon the floor and breathing heavily.

"No, he is not dead, and I hope will come round all right," he said.

"Yes, he'll be spry ag'in in an hour or so, for I didn't give him much."

"I takes it myself sometimes when I has neuralgy."

"The dog's all right, Cap."

"Well, he'll have too much sense to take anything to eat from you again, and if he don't jump on you in revenge when he comes round, I'll be surprised."

"Lordy, don't say that, for he's a bad 'un."

Not noticing the man Nat turned to Olive and again asked her how she had happened upon the scene.

She told him, and bringing the basket the man was told to eat his supper, but he was not hungry and put it aside.

"Lie down upon that cot."

The prisoner obeyed, and with a rope brought him by Olive from his room, Nat fastened the man securely to the cot.

"Now, sir, we will work on poor Sentinel," and New York Nat dragged the unconscious dog into his own room, the curtains were closed and the lamps lighted, and the two set to work to see if Sentinel could not be revived.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MASKED JURY.

It was nearly an hour before Sentinel was able to look about him with any degree of sense.

Then he seemed to realize that he had been a very wicked dog, and rising, tottered, as though he had been drinking hard, across the room, his tail stuck between his legs and in a very shamed-faced way lay down in a corner.

"How have the mighty fallen!"

"Just to think that Sentinel would ever look so sheepish," said Olive laughing.

"Yes, he could sit for a photograph of a sheep now from his looks; but I'm so glad to have him all right again I'll forgive him, Sis."

"Yes, for I am sure he will never do so any more."

"We will see how he regards the prisoner now."

"Come, Sentinel!"

The dog arose with reluctance, but grew steadier on his legs as he walked and followed Nat into the prisoner's room, Olive carrying the lantern.

The moment he saw the prisoner he growled savagely and showed his teeth, seeming to realize that he was the author of his woes.

"Lie there, Sentinel," ordered Nat, and he left the man and the dog in the dark, conscious that he could fully trust his dumb guard once more.

Then, while Olive prepared for the coming of the band, Nat went down and lighted the lantern in the cellar, at the same time unlocking the door.

Olive's toilet in which to meet the band was a black domino and a mask.

She went into the assembly room and looked over the books of the various meetings until Nat returned accompanied by several of the Boy Police who had already put in an appearance.

By the names they were down on the register, they were Keno, Blow and Teaser. Soon after Doc, Flip and Fatty arrived, then Parson alone, next came Freckles and Chub, followed by Shorty and Slim, and it was not long before each member of the Boy Police League had assembled.

The fact that the Ferret Queen had called the special meeting had made all anxious regarding Nat, and they were glad to see him in his seat as presiding officer and apparently well.

They each one saluted the young Queen, and welcomed her home again, for she had

been away with Mrs. Herbert for a rest of a few weeks, so had not attended the last meetings.

They saluted her with marked politeness, and she extended her hand to each one, after which New York Nat called the meeting to order.

In a few words he spoke of being at the Concert Garden the evening before and having recognized as one he had seen before, and under disagreeable circumstances he was sure, the gentleman who was the escort of Miss Maybel Kingdon.

"Here is her address, and the man's name I cannot give you; but I wish to know who he is, what he is, and all that you can find out about him, and this is work for each and every one of you to go upon at times you can do so."

"At the garden also was another man whom I recognized, but could not recall."

"He had a companion with him, and the two eyed me closely."

"When I left they shadowed me."

Then Nat went on to tell how he had eluded them by going into the Barrett House and changing to his quick disguise, but not referring to Olive's having been with him.

What followed he told, and how Mr. Sherman Canfield had been the one to come to his aid and run down the prisoner, adding:

"Now who this man is I do not know, but his companion was Killer Bill, who knows me as the one who thwarted him before, and sent him back to prison."

"His pal must know of his whereabouts, and the secret can be forced from him."

"That he is equally bad with Killer Bill is certain, and my wish is to try him by our Masked Jury to-night and frighten him into all confessions we can get from him."

"His companion must be hunted down, and that must also be the work of each and all of you."

The story of the man's two attempts upon his life, his having been saved by the coming of their Queen, and how Sentinel had been dosed with morphine was all told, the Boy Police listening in deepest silence, and showing the intense interest they felt in all that they heard.

With one accord they arose and hurried to their Queen, in admiration of her services to their young captain, and then each one passed along and grasped his hand in token of their appreciation of his escape.

"Now, comrades, it is for the prisoner to be brought before you for trial."

"Prepare to face him as the Masked Jury," ordered Nat.

The young ferrets went into another room, and in a short while they re-entered in silence and took their seats, each one of them wearing a black domino and a black mask, upon the forehead of the latter being a skull and cross-bones.

The Ferret Queen had had no reason to change her garb, but New York Nat had gone to his room and returned robed as were the others.

"Is the jury ready to try the prisoner?" asked Nat slowly.

"The jury is ready!" came the answer in chorus, and it reached the ears of the prisoner.

"Let the two guards fetch the prisoner before the bar!"

Two of the ferrets arose and entering the room adjoining soon returned with the prisoner, close behind whose heels walked the dumb Sentinel.

As the lamps on the table revealed the scene the prisoner trembled when he saw that he was in the presence of the Masked Jury.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SENTENCE.

ZIP RALSTON was terribly frightened, when he faced that black-robed, masked assemblage.

So much was he alarmed that he felt a pang of the deepest regret that he had ever left the prison and wished himself back again in his cell.

He mentally cursed Killer Bill for having been at the garden concert and thus gotten him into trouble.

There was but one lamp upon the table, and it revealed objects not too distinctly in the large room.

At the table sat New York Nat and Olive, and on the seats fronting it were the Boy Police serving as the Masked Jury.

All were as silent as death.

With a rap on his table New York Nat ordered the prisoner seated where he could face the Masked Jury, and the man dropped into the chair as though glad to no longer trust his legs.

"Prisoner, what is your name?" said the young ferret chief, speaking purposely in a low, deep tone.

"Zip Ralston," was the answer and then quickly came the words:

"No, no, I made a mistake, my name is—"

"Zip Ralston is the name you will be tried under," broke in Nat, and the Ferret Queen wrote it down.

"What is your trade or profession?"

"I'm a—a—a blacksmith."

"Where do you work?"

The man with still more hesitancy gave a number, and then came the question:

"Where do you live?"

The address to which Sherman Canfield had shadowed him was not the one given, but both were entered by Olive, for New York Nat had the street and number given him by the Nebraskan.

So the questions went on, and the prisoner's hesitation and replies showed that he was not telling the truth.

Then New York Nat said:

"Read the charges against this man."

The Ferret Queen read them in a low, disguised voice, to the effect that the prisoner was the pal of Killer Bill, an escaped convict in for life, and the two had shadowed a young man from the Concert Garden to a hotel, where he had claimed to another person who approached him, to be a detective, and, when arrested, had been rescued by his pal, Killer Bill, who had attempted twice the life of the officer of the law who held him as prisoner.

The charge of the attack on Sherman Canfield was read, the capture, the effort of the prisoner to escape by killing his keeper, and the last attempt to get away by dosing the dog with morphine and breaking the leg from a chair in the room where he was confined with which to take the life of the one who was guarding him, but who, suffering from the injuries inflicted upon him by his, the prisoner's, companion, was resting and asleep.

"What have you to say to these charges against you, prisoner?" asked New York Nat.

"I says that a man has got ter pfect himself when he's in danger, for how'd I know I wasn't goin' ter be kilt?"

"You admit that you are guilty then?"

"I is guilty o' pfectin' myself."

"The Masked Jury has heard the charges and the answers of the prisoner."

"His fate is in their hands," said New York Nat.

The jury never moved, and not a word was heard.

They sat in a deathlike silence, a silence that was broken suddenly by a long, dismal howl from Sentinel.

It startled all and nothing could have been more impressive just at that moment than that uncanny howl from the dog, who seemed to feel that he was himself on trial for his sin of yielding to temptation, and expressed his sorrow accordingly.

But the prisoner turned livid at the dismal

howl of Sentinel and gazed appealingly toward the jury.

"Have the jury decided upon their verdict?" asked New York Nat sternly, as soon as the echo of Sentinel's howl had died away through the old mansion.

"We have," was the answer.

"What is the verdict?"

"Guilty!"

"Is there a dissenting voice?"

Not a voice replied, showing that the verdict was unanimous, and the prisoner moved uneasily in his chair and pressed his manacled hands hard together.

"What is your sentence upon the prisoner?" asked New York Nat impressively.

"Death!"

"Is there a dissenting voice?"

Again silence followed the question save the low moan of the prisoner.

"Prisoner, you have heard, and death is the sentence upon you, so prepare to die within the next twenty-four hours."

"Guards, lead the prisoner back and put him in double irons."

"My God! don't kill me as you hope for mercy," cried the prisoner as he was led away.

CHAPTER XIV.

PUT TO THE TEST.

NEW YORK NAT recovered his mask and gown as soon as the prisoner was led from the room and the others quickly followed his example, Olive alone remaining masked.

The faces of the band of Boy Police did not look very serious, like what would be expected of those who had just sentenced a fellow-being to death, and Nat said presently:

"Well, boys, we have him thoroughly scared under his death sentence, and now it will be for me to make him confess all that he knows, by promising his life, for of course he does not know that we have no authority to try him and would not dare condemn him to death in earnest."

"The truth is that he doubtless deserves hanging, but that must be for the law to decide, and we will have done our share if we can make him betray his pal, Killer Bill, and any other men of that stripe whom he may be associated with."

"I will have a talk with him later tonight, and under the promise of sparing his life if he makes a clean breast of it may learn what we would know."

"Now you are dismissed, and do not forget that you are to hunt up the record of the man I described to you and who was with Miss Maybel Kingdon two nights ago at the garden concert."

The boys arose, and those who had reports to make of any discoveries they had made, or desired any money, came forward and told the Ferret Queen, who wrote down what they had to say, or paid them the sums asked for.

In a short while the room was cleared of all save Nat and Olive and together they looked over the reports of the ferrets, and then Nat said:

"Now come, Olive, and we will see what that man has to say for himself."

They entered the room together and found Sentinel on his post at the door.

Upon his cot, and ironed hands and feet, now lay the prisoner, groaning as though in great pain.

"For a man who is a villain by nature that fellow is the greatest coward I ever saw, for men of the criminal class do not generally whine and tremble," muttered Nat.

Approaching the cot he said, while Olive sat near the open door:

"I am sorry for you, Zip Ralston, but if you commit crime you must expect to suffer for it."

"I wish to know who it is that has sen-

tenced me to death, for that was no judge and jury."

"It was a self constituted judge and jury, one that holds life cheap to gain its ends, and would show you mercy only on certain conditions."

"What does they want?"

"You are sentenced to die, and those who have found you guilty are Man-Hunters; in other words, officers of the law who hunt down your kind."

"You are a fugitive from justice—"

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"What does you know?"

"Just what I tell you, and if you wish to save your life you can do so, perhaps, in one way, for I will put it to the vote whether to spare you for a confession that will entrap others."

"Can you do that?"

"I will see what you desire to do first."

"What do you wish to know?"

"The hiding-place of Killer Bill."

"I never was thar."

"Do not lie to me if you wish me to plead for your life."

"I say I never was at his place, for I only met him at the concert and recognized him after awhile as a convict at the same—I means at prison."

"Yes, you mean the same prison you were in."

"I didn't say so."

"You nearly implied as much; but then you made yourself known to him and at once became pals?"

"Yes."

"And how came you to shadow that young man you saw there?"

"Bill said as how he was lookin' for revenge and money, and he recognized the young fellow as the detective who had kilt his pal, Red Fred, and sent him back to his cell, and he wanted to knife him, and so we followed him."

"And Bill was going to your home that night?"

"Yes."

"But went to his own quarters?"

"Yes."

"Where did he live?"

"He told me he hung out at number — Bleecker street."

"Under what name?"

"Fred Williams."

"And you were to unite your fortunes, were you?"

"Yes, that was it, and now you won't let 'em kill me will you?"

"Tell me just who you are, and what you are?"

"You knows my right name, and I was a prisoner with Bill, but escaped."

"Now you knows all, so don't let 'em kill me."

"I will promise you your life, for that I can do," was New York Nat's response, and he continued:

"You are to remain here a prisoner until it is decided where you shall be sent; but the guard over you will be one who will see that you do not escape, and Sentinel will be on hand also, while you will be doubly ironed, as you cannot be trusted."

"Here is your supper, so eat it and rest contented that your life will be spared," and Nat left the room.

Joining Olive the two left the building together and the young ferret chief escorted her to her home, when he returned to the old mansion to find the prisoner sleeping soundly and Sentinel on duty just outside of the door.

"Now to run down Killer Bill," muttered Nat as he went to his own room and turned in for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

KILLER BILL.

THE pal of Zip Ralston had gone to his own room, which was in a better locality

than the one where his fellow convict had found lodgings, and in an hour's time had returned as he had promised he would.

But he did not find Zip awaiting him, as he had expected.

He did not wish to venture by night into the rickety old tenement-house in search of him, and hardly knew what to do, for he could not understand why Zip had deserted him.

"I'd give a dollar to know what become of him?" muttered Killer Bill as he stood in the shadow of the building.

"Done, mister, I'll earn that dollar," said a voice almost within reach of his arm, and out of the shadow of an area stepped a young gamin of about ten years of age.

He was ragged, woefully soiled but bright and forward.

"What does you know, kid?"

"Enough to git that dollar yer said yer would give, or was yer lyin' to yerself, cully?"

"Did my pal leave any message with you?"

"Not a one."

"Did you see a man here?"

"Yas, the one you left here and who was to wait for you."

"How do you know?"

"I was a-sleepin' in my bed thar among the boxes, and heerd yer."

"Where is he?"

"Don't you wish yer knowed?"

"See here, kid, I'll ring yer neck ef yer don't tell me."

"I tells nothin' without pay, so put up yer dollar or shut up, see?"

Killer Bill make a quick lick at the boy, but it was most cleverly dodged, and then the gamin, from a safe distance called out:

"Yer'd not stand palaverin' here for a dollar if yer know'd what happened him."

"Come, I'll be good as my word and give you the dollar."

"Let me see the money."

"There it is."

"That's a silver dollar and it hain't worth now what it used to be—silver is down."

"Well, will a paper dollar suit you?"

"If it hain't a counterfeit, and you looks like a shover of the queer."

Again the boy dodged, for this time it was a kick Zip suddenly gave.

"Here, stop that fooling and here is your money."

He held out his hand as he spoke, the dollar between his two fingers, and quick as a flash the boy had it.

But he did not dash away as Ralston expected he would, but said in his impudent way:

"I'll write you a receipt in the morning for this dollar; but now ter give you the story of your pal."

"Well, be quick about it."

"He's gone to roost."

"To his room?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"The clubbers has got 'em."

"The perlice?"

"Yas, ther cops, or leastwise ther crook-catchers."

"You mean the detectives?"

"Yas."

"How was it?" uneasily asked the convict.

"One feller was a-doggin' yer, and when you left he comes along playin' loaded to ther guards."

"He war a showin' up his sparkler and chain, and yer pal thought he'd take him in when he axed him ter steer him to a hack-roost for a fiver."

"But yer pal made the mistake o' his life-time, for quicker than a cat's jump ther feller had him in his grip and I tell yer he handled him in great shape, and soon had him choked quiet and says to him pleasant like:

"Now I'll show you to a hack-stand."

"Waal, I guesses he did, for they went off together, and I jist lay low and was asleep and dreamin' of my best Sunday gal when you comes along and disturbs me by yer remarks, for I sleeps light, seein' as ther clubbers moves me on several times during the night."

But Killer Bill waited to hear no more.

He had heard already too much for his own comfort and muttered to himself:

"Zip bagged already, and jist as we had become partners."

"We war shadderred, war we?"

"Well, that means for me to change my quarters, for they may pinch him ter squeal, and he's got but little sand and would sell me out cheap."

"I war a fool to give him my number, but I moves, and quick, too."

He walked rapidly back to his quarters, and, after reconnoitering, entered and went to his room, a dingy one on the third floor back of a cheap lodging house.

He had only a small grip with him, and quickly he gathered his few belongings and stole quietly out of the house, going to a cheap hotel on Canal street and paying for a room for the night.

"I'm a fool to live in cheap quarters and be dodgin' ther cops as a poor man, when I has it in my power ter live rich and play the gent, for ther's one whom I kin force to pay me big money, and I'll do it, for he's rich and a blood, while I'm hidin' and sufferin'."

CHAPTER XVI.

AT HIS MERCY.

FORD RAYFIELD was known as one of fortune's favorites, and was envied by his fellows for his handsome face and form, his generous income and a way he had of winning hearts.

In business circles he was known as a broker, and had an office near Wall street where he appeared to be thriving, for his patrons were many and his paper was good in the street and taken as "gilt edge" whenever offered for sale.

Broker Rayfield must have had most trustworthy clerks, for he was wont to come down to his office about noon and leave at three.

He drove in the Park every afternoon, driving a pair of fast steppers, and owned a small yacht he was wont to take his friends sailing in upon the Hudson, the Sound or the Lower Bay.

His quarters were handsomely furnished, and he occupied a flat in a fashionable building.

In one of the leading churches he paid for a pew, where his out-of-town friends were oftener seen than he was, but then the pastor never scolded him for non-attendance as he was always so generous in his donations to him and to charity.

One afternoon Ford Rayfield sat in his private office when a clerk stated that a man wished to see him.

"Who is he?"

"Never saw him before, sir, and he's a rough-looking specimen."

"Tell him I am busy."

The clerk soon returned and said:

"He says he will wait to see you if it is night when you leave, sir, and if he fails to see you then he will know where to find you to-night as he is posted as to where you visit."

"You had better see him, sir, for he seems ugly in humor."

"Show him in," and Ford Rayfield quietly drew a revolver from his pistol-pocket and placed it under some papers on his desk within reach of his hand.

A moment after the clerk showed the persistent visitor in, and the face of the handsome broker changed color as he saw him.

The visitor entered with a swagger and said in a loud tone:

"My dear boy Fred, they said you war too busy to see an old friend, but I know'd better, for it wasn't like yer, as I know'd yer in past days."

"I guesses they jumped to it that 'cause I wasn't fixed up fine I was some tramp a-lookin' fer money, when ther fact is, I'm here ter deposit with yer, for I has struck it rich, and has got money ter throw to ther kids."

"Give us yer hand, old pard."

Fred Rayfield's face was a study as his visitor spoke, in a voice that all in the adjoining office could hear, but he rose and extending his hand said aloud:

"Clothes do not make the man, Williams, old friend and my clerks were wrong to be rude to you, for I am more than glad to see you, only I am terribly busy just now, and I am going to ask you to come up and spend the evening with me at my rooms, and we will have a talk over old times."

"Here is my address, and I shall look for you," and Ford Rayfield wrote something on a card and handed it to his visitor, who said:

"Just like you, old pard."

"The same fellow I used to know in the mines of New Mexico, for fine clothes, diamonds and b'iled shirts hain't spoilt yer."

"I'll be thar, pard, and on time, and don't you forget it, so now I bids yer adoo," and the visitor departed, the clerks from the inner office crowding to the outer door to get a glimpse of the strange character.

When the door closed upon him Ford Rayfield dropped back in his comfortable chair and covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out some scene that rose before his eyes.

Then his lips moved and he muttered:

"My God! why has he come here?"

"I believed him buried alive and out of my life forever, and now he is free and again crosses my path."

"It can mean but one of two things, my money or my ruin."

"Which shall it be?"

For a long while he sat in silence, apparently deeply moved by the visit of the strange man.

But at last a clerk came in, and he was at once again the calm, courtly gentleman all his people knew him to be.

Soon after he left the office, and taking a cab, drove up-town to his rooms.

His valet admitted him and he said:

"You can have an afternoon and night off, Ditson, as I shall be out of town until midnight."

"But be back by then."

"Yes, Mr. Rayfield," said the man and he gladly availed himself of the permission given him.

For a long time after the departure of his valet, Ford Rayfield paced to and fro, from one end of his large flat to another.

It was luxuriously furnished, and fine paintings and engravings hung on the walls, but nothing seemed to attract him then as his thoughts were busy, and seemingly of a painful nature.

At length he went out to a fashionable hotel and ordered a most tempting dinner.

But he drank the wine and ate but little.

Then he returned to his rooms, lighted the gas and waited.

When a ring came at his door he answered it himself, and in walked the visitor of the morning at his office.

It was Killer Bill, and he wore the air of a man who felt himself master of the situation and who held the man he came to see wholly at his mercy.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEMAND.

"WELL, you have come," said Rayfield, doggedly, as his visitor entered, tossed his

hat upon a sofa and took the best seat in the room.

"Of course."

"You didn't think I was such a fool as to stay away after I'd found you."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Money."

"I have paid you for your services three times over."

"Yes, and you'll pay me again."

"Not a dollar."

Killer Biller laughed and Ford Rayfield repeated:

"Not a dollar."

"You say so."

"I mean it."

"Well, we'll see if you does."

"See here, Williams, our compacts are all at an end."

"When we were in the mines together you and I were partners in an affair that brought money to both of us."

"You got your pay and left, promising never to cross my path again."

"You broke your word and came to me in Frisco, and again you bled me."

"I left the Pacific Slope and went to Texas and you turned up there, and again you got money from me."

"I came to New York and one day saw your ugly face in the paper and referred to as one who was suspected of having committed a murder years ago and escaped."

"The papers stated afterwards that your guilt had been proven and your sentence was to the Penitentiary for life."

"Now you appear before me again and demand money, and the only wonder to me is that you, an escaped convict as you must be, dare risk yourself as you do in the streets of New York."

"Bah! risk nothing gain nothing, Ford, old boy."

"I'm here, and I want money."

"You can get none from me."

"Suppose I peach about that affair in the mines, eh?"

"You have no proof, and if you had it would only prove your guilt."

"Would it?"

"Yes."

"We shall see, for suppose I have kept proofs you supposed were destroyed."

"I'm no fool, pard, and I looks ahead, and I tells yer dead on ther level that I kin make yer pay me ther money I wants."

"You cannot."

"Let us see if I can't, when I tells yer that I knows who ther lady is yer is sparkin', for I seen yer at ther garden concert some nights ago, and I learns she is worth a couple o' million in hard cash, or her daddy will give her that much."

"Now, you loves her, and her gold, and she is dead gone on you I hears; but when she hears my story, then your last card is played, and I wins ther game."

"You would not dare go to Miss Kingdon with your lies."

"No, I'd tell her the truth."

"And she would not believe you."

"She would believe truth when I has ther proofs."

"William, why do you hound me as you do, for I have paid you three fold every dollar I promised you I would?"

Killer Bill sprung to his feet, his face livid, his eyes ablaze, while he hissed forth:

"Why does I hound you, Ford Rayfield?"

"I'll tell yer, and it won't be pleasant hearin'."

"I came back to this city with a little money, determined to lead a new life."

"I was recognized as the murderer of old Norcross, or at least I was suspected, and though I shared the plunder I did not give the blow that kilt him."

"I told you all about it in the mines, for I trusted you with my life, and that gave you power over me."

"Then you had a game to win, and knowing my story you got me to help yer."

"I did, and you took the trick."

"You paid me, yes, and again and again, for my conscience hurt me and I lived high to drown it."

"Then I came here, was accused of having murdered old Norcross and robbed him, and yet there was no proof and I would have been set free but for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I means that you wanted me hanged to hide your own act, and so you paid a man to swear that I was with him the night old Norcross was kilt, and that I helped in the murder and robbery."

"In my baggage a pin that had belonged to the old man was found and recognized, and that settled it for me and I was sent up for life, while the fellow who had pretended to turn state's evidence, was set free."

"But he was a bad one and soon after committed a crime, and he was sent up for life."

"At first we were put in the same cell and with nothing to gain or lose, he told me how he had been paid by you to put that pin in my baggage, for it was one I had given you and told you then how I got it."

"He told me you had paid him big money to pretend to be guilty and swear my life away."

"I took a solemn vow to escape and make you pay for your crime ag'in' me, Ford Rayfield, and here I is, and I demand big money, or I ruins you, so take your choice atween them."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEATH-SHOT.

FORD RAYFIELD had paced to and fro, while Killer Bill was talking, and his brow was clouded, his lips set.

At last, when the demand was made he turned and faced the man and said:

"So you believe that I paid a man to testify against you?"

"I do."

"What proof have you?"

"His word."

"Where is the man?"

"Why does yer wish to know?"

"I have my reasons."

"He's not in prison."

"Where is he?"

"He escaped, as I did."

"I do not believe you."

"It's a fact, for he was with me at the Concert Garden the other night, we was playin' gents, yer see, and I seen you there and recognized yer, and I seen yer pretty lady love, too, and thinks I to myself, it's a bad deal for her to marry a man I knows carries ther black heart you does, Ford Rayfield."

"Silence, or I will knife you!" and with the words Ford Rayfield whipped out a long-bladed knife and stepped toward his enemy.

"Oh, don't play that game, for I were no fool to come here without my gun, and besides I has friends waitin' for me outside, and I tells 'em ef I doesn't come out in a given time ter come in and see if I has been dealt with foul, for I knows you from 'way back, Pard Ford, so put up yer knife."

With a low-uttered imprecation the broker obeyed, and the convict went on to say:

"Yes, you has got to pay me what I demands, and it is big money I wants."

"I is tired dodgin' ther perleece, and hidin' from ferrets and livin' in fear o' goin' back to thet life in a tomb."

"I wants money to go away from here to seek some land where I kin live in comfort without fear and try and be as honest in my later years as I has been bad in them that has gone by."

"What do you call big money, I ask you?"

"What is you worth?"

"Apparently a great deal, but in reality not much."

"Well, yer credit is good so you can raise it, and I wants fifty thousand dollars."

"Fifty thousand devils!"

"No, one like you is enough for me to deal with."

"But that is the sum I wants and will have."

"I am not worth over that amount."

"Well, you is goin' ter marry millions, and soon, too, I hears, and yer notes are gilt edge I learns, so you kin raise it."

"Call it half the sum and I will try, on condition that you never again cross my path."

"I'll make the condition for fifty thousand and not a dollar less."

"You must lower your figure."

"Pay it, or I'll ask the lady to give that much to save her from you."

"Curse you, I'll pay it, but you must give me time."

"How long?"

"A month in which to raise it, for I have some notes coming in that must be met, and this done I can raise money again on my paper."

"Give me a couple of hundred to live on and I'll give you the time you ask; but, I will stand no nonsense and it will be pay me within a month or go down with a crash."

"Does yer understand now I accepts your compromise?"

"Yes, I understand. Now be off."

"The two hundred and fifty, please, for living expenses."

"You said two hundred just now."

"Then you'd have saved fifty by not making me ask a second time."

"A man of your stripe should live on fifty dollars."

"Don't mention anything about a stripe, for it makes me shudder; but, you are as wicked as I am and you get the best there is, while I suffer."

"Here is the money."

"Good! and don't fail about the other, for you know what my threats mean."

"Good-night, pard, and luck to you, for on your fortune depends mine—tra-la-la," and the man backed to the door, as though suspicious of an attack, and not without cause, for as he opened it the right hand of Ford Rayfield was suddenly thrust forward and a flash and report followed, and mingling with the sound came a cry of agony and a heavy fall.

But it was not Killer Dick who had fallen, for he had sprung to one side, seeing the act of Rayfield, and the bullet had crashed into the body of poor Ditson, the valet, who was just entering the door.

Ford Rayfield saw his fatal mistake, saw that Killer Bill was in full flight, and instantly he turned and fired several shots rapidly at different parts of the room opening with folding-doors into the hall, shattering a mirror and doing other damage.

Then he sprung out into the hall and shouted loudly:

"Below stairs, there!"

"Stop that man, for he has killed my valet."

But he took good care not to call out until he was sure that Killer Bill had escaped from the house.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEW YORK NAT FINDS A CLUE.

THOUGH in double irons, New York Nat felt that he must keep an eye upon his prisoner, and also upon Sentinel, who had once fallen from grace by accepting food from one he had been put to guard carefully.

There was, of course, a bare possibility that the police might some time happen in upon the old mansion, and yet they, as the neighbors did, seemed most anxious to shun it, and as long as there was no complaint

made of any disturbance there, Nat did not dread a raid.

When he returned in the morning after the meeting of the young ferrets, bringing the prisoner's breakfast, Nat said:

"Remember, Ralston, if you make any outcry you will have to be gagged as well as ironed, and as I shall leave you no food, sitting by you to see you eat your breakfast, you will have no chance to again tempt the dog, who will be kept on guard outside.

"I will be on hand when wanted, and your telling your story as you did last night has saved your life at least, and it remains for your future conduct to show what other kindness you deserve."

Leaving the man some books to look over, and placing Sentinel on guard outside, Nat left the old mansion dressed as a young dude, wearing eye-glasses, a high hat and carrying a cane.

He wended his way to the home of Walter Vanderlip, where Sherman Canfield was staying as master in the miner's absence, and representing him as the ally of the Boy Ferrets, and entering the house with his pass-key he found the Nebraskan reading his papers and smoking.

"Well, Nat, how are you, for I felt anxious as you did not put in an appearance yesterday?"

"I'm all right, sir, thank you, though my side is still sore and my head a little rocky; but I've had a picnic since I saw you, Mr. Canfield," and Nat told of his adventures with the prisoner, and the mock-trial.

"You are indeed fortunate to have escaped.

"But you frightened the fellow into a confession?"

"Yes, sir, I promised him that which the law cannot take now, as he is a condemned convict for life; but then he was frightened into telling who he was and I'll get you, sir, to look up his record to-day, for the chief will give it to you."

"I'll go down this morning and do so; but about that other fellow, his pal?"

"I will go to see one of my boys, who works in a messenger office, and send him there and see if he can be found.

"If not he must be tracked to where he has moved, and then I'll set a trap for him, as he is too dangerous a man to be at large, and has nerve and daring, which Ralston has not."

After some further conversation together Sherman Canfield walked out with Nat, going to see the inspector, while the young ferret went to put Teaser on the track of Killer Bill.

His card promptly admitted Sherman Canfield to the private office of the great Secret Service Chief, who greeted him cordially and said:

"Have you heard from our friend, Vanderlip, lately?"

"Yes, sir, he will return within a month, for he has about settled the troubles that called him out to the mine."

"I am glad to hear it; but he left a most able representative in you, Mr. Canfield.

"Now tell me if there is any news of my Unknown and most respected detectives, whose identity you so carefully guard from me?"

"Yes, sir, I have news of him and of his allies, for he is now upon an important service.

"Will you kindly give me the record of this man?"

"Zip Ralston," and the inspector rung a bell and handing the slip of paper to a clerk, said bluntly:

"Bring his record."

It was soon placed before the inspector, on a slip of paper, as follows:

"Zip Ralston, convict at —, life sentence.

"See photograph page 400, for description, age, height, weight, etc.

"A born crook, and sentenced as an accomplice in Benham murder case.

"Escaped from prison August 1st, 18—."

"Thank you, chief," and Sherman Canfield took his leave armed with the paper giving the record of Nat's prisoner.

Later in the afternoon Nat called and was given the paper and said:

"Teaser found my man had slipped out of his room the night you saw him, taking all his things with him, though his room rent was paid for a week yet.

"You doubtless frightened him when he found his pal captured.

"Teaser then went to the neighboring lodging-houses to see if he had not put up at one of these until morning, and found him registered at the first one he visited."

"That was lucky."

"Yes, sir, and I shall shadow him myself now, with the aid of some of my boys, for I have decided upon a plan to trap him."

"May I ask what it is?"

"Yes, sir, certainly. I shall have Ralston write for him that he is in hiding, and to come to him."

"He is a bold fellow to bring to bay, Nat, so you had better let me help you."

"Thanks, Mr. Canfield, I will call on you, sir, if I have to do so, but I have no right to risk your life in my ferret work," and Nat soon after took his departure, going to the Herbert cottage, and well satisfied with his day's work and the clue he had found of Killer Bill.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT NAT SAW AND HEARD.

WHEN New York Nat set out to work to run a crook down, he went at it in a way that meant success.

He had Ralston a prisoner, and had detailed two of his League to take turns in being in the mansion to keep guard over him in his absence, for he was on the track of Killer Bill.

In tracking the convict at large he did not neglect other duties, and having had the report given him by Parson regarding the gentleman at the concert with Miss Maybel Kingdon, he decided to have a look in upon him and strive to recall just when and where he had seen him.

Having his name and address written down in his note-book, Nat went to the number given to try and invent some way to get to see and talk with the gentleman whose face haunted him.

He stepped into the handsome entrance to the flat-house and glanced over the names on the cards above the letter-boxes.

He saw that the name he looked for was the right-hand flat on the top floor, and that the left-hand flat was unoccupied, for the card bore the words:

"Not for rent."

As he was looking over the names a man rented, and seeing him, said politely:

"Is there any one you are looking for, sir, that I can help you to find?"

Nat gave a name not on the cards, and the man said:

"I know of no one in the house by that name, sir, and in fact most all the people living here are away for the summer."

"You live here then?"

"Yes, I am valet for Mr. Ford Rayfield."

"Ah, indeed, I have met Mr. Rayfield.

"Is he in?"

"Yes, sir, he gave me an afternoon and evening off as he was going to the country, but I was disappointed in meeting a friend, so returned home early, but finding he had company, and a rough looking chap he was, I went out again."

"I have heard that Mr. Rayfield had some rare paintings and statuary in his rooms, and I do not know him well enough to call and ask him to show them to me; but, perhaps you could arrange it in some way for me, as

I am an artist in my line, and I would make it to your interest to do so."

"Thank you, sir, I guess I can let you see them, for Mr. Rayfield is always out between twelve and four, except Sundays; but, I wish I knew who the chap is up there, for I don't like his looks."

"I will call to-morrow, then, and here is a card so you will not forget me," and Nat slipped a two-dollar bill into the valet's hands and departed.

But he watched from across the street and saw that there was a bright light in the rooms of Ford Rayfield, and certainly the valet had not had time to get up-stairs and light the gas.

Mr. Rayfield must have returned then, he decided.

As he turned away slowly recrossing the street, he heard a shot distinctly, and a minute after, as he stood wondering at it, the door of the flat opened suddenly and out dashed a man apparently fleeing for his life, while other shots, one two, three, were also heard, followed by a voice calling out to stop the murderer.

But the man was already half a square away and was walking leisurely along.

New York Nat's first resolve was to dash up to see the cause of the shots, and it struck him then as strange that the three following the first one had been so long after, while the cry had come later still.

But there was that in the appearance of the man who dashed out of the flat-house that at once riveted his gaze and caused him to take no heed of the shots or the call, but to follow him, apparently not doing so.

"Ah! I recognize that face and form, and I am in luck.

"It is Killer Bill," said Nat to himself, and he at once decided to stick to his man, come what might.

This he did and saw him go to the lodging-house where he had been tracked before.

"He has been in some deviltry in that flat-house and will not stay here.

"I remember the valet said that he returned to find a man visiting his master, whose appearance he did not like, and it was none other than Killer Bill.

"Now to see if I am not right."

Nat had not long to wait before out came Killer Bill, carrying his grip.

He was dressed in a pea-jacket, blue pants and sea cap, affecting the sailor-look and swaggered as he walked.

With no thought of being shadowed he went to another part of town and found a hotel of a better class, registering as

"WILLIAM BILLUPS,
Portland, Maine."

Nat at once registered also and paid for his room for three days, and was shown to one adjoining that of Killer Bill, whom he heard talking to himself as he walked excitedly up and down his room.

The words were muttered rather than spoken, but he caught now and then enough to give him a clue to the firing he had heard; for they were:

"Tricky as Satan—he tried to kill me, and the man coming in as I went out got it—

"How will he get out of the scrape?"

"But he meant to kill me, and he shall pay double now, or bang, man of fashion and influence that—yes, Ford Rayfield, my old mining pard, half you have must come my way—no chance again at my life—hope the killing won't get him into trouble—papers will tell."

So much did Nat catch and then he left the room, for the convict had thrown himself upon his bed to sleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BROKER'S STORY.

NEW YORK NAT left his room noiselessly, not wishing the occupant next door to hear him and feel that he had a neighbor,

He made his way at once to the scene of the flat-house tragedy and found a crowd gathered there.

From a bystander he heard that the rich broker, Ford Rayfield, had been attacked in his room by a robber, and that a number of shots had been fired, and the valet had been killed.

Picking up what information he could from the various reports of the bystanders, he heard that the body of the unfortunate valet had been taken to the undertaker's, and the chief of police was then up-stairs with Mr. Rayfield.

To the undertaker's Nat went, and showing a badge as a reporter for a Boston paper, he asked to see the body, and a glance showed him that it was his acquaintance of a couple of hours before.

Then Nat went to his uncanny quarters, arriving after midnight, but finding his guard on duty, and Sentinel at the door of the prisoner.

"He is all safe, Chub, so go to bed and I think the morning will reveal something to us," said Nat, and he was soon fast asleep as was Chub also.

Nat was up at seven and went to breakfast at the cottage, and to make known to Olive the discoveries he had made the night before.

He kept Chub on guard, and took him and the prisoner an excellent breakfast from the cottage, not forgetting Sentinel.

The prisoner ate with a relish, and when the meal was concluded Nat said to him:

"I have found your friend, Bill."

"You has?"

"Yes, I can put my clutches on him at any time; but I want your written statement of what you told me about him and yourself as well."

"I hain't much of a writer."

"But you do write?"

"I kin sling ink, but my spellin' is away off, and my writin' looks drunk."

"Well, write as I tell you, and have you any paper?"

"Yes, I has a note-book what Bill give me to do some figurin' in."

"That will do."

"I will get you pen and ink."

This was done, and the convict wrote the story as he had told it, of what he knew of Killer Bill and his own record.

Then Nat took the paper into the assembly room, and seating himself at a table, began to study the writing.

He was an expert penman and possessed the dangerous accomplishment of imitating handwriting.

After a while he set to work, upon the leaves from the note-book which he had torn out with those Ralston had written upon, and this was the result, the writing being a perfect imitation of Ralston's cramped hand, and the spelling and composition likewise:

"PARD BILL

"I takes my pen in han to tell you i was run in by a perleese, but I bort him to let me go fer a twenty-doller note.

"I then comed hear whar I hed bin hid-in befour, an hes lay low ever sinse. I wants ter see you bad, fer i hes a big thing on han fer makin money, so i sends this by a boy who will bring you ter me safe, an dont fale to come for my sake an your own, for you goes in with me.

"No more till i see you

"From your troo pal,

"Zip R—."

"p s. i sends this to ther place whar you tole me you fed, an tells the boy to wait an see you, for the boss of the hash house ter show you to him."

This letter was put into a soiled envelope, and addressed in the same crude style to the convict at the number where Ralston told

Nat that Killer Bill had said he always took his meals.

Chub was then given the decoy letter and his instructions and departed on his mission to bring Killer Bill to the Haunted House, telling him also to appoint a time after night-fall, and to send there ahead of him Teaser, Doc and Parson.

Chub having departed upon his errand, New York Nat opened the morning papers and sat down to read the accounts of the tragedy at the Rayfield flat the night before, for he had seen the ever-energetic reporters there getting items.

The affair was noticed in large head-lines, and Nat read as follows:

"A TRAGEDY IN A FASHIONABLE FLAT!

"AN ATTEMPT TO KILL MR. RAYFIELD!

"A Pretended Friend Proves to be a Robber!

"A BRAVE VALET KILLED!

"The Murderer Escapes!

"FORD REDFIELD'S STORY!

"While seated in his handsome downtown office yesterday a rough-looking man, clad in soiled attire, demanded to see Mr. Ford Rayfield, the popular broker, and was admitted.

"Mr. Rayfield was some years ago a miner in New Mexico, and there met one whom the man claimed to be, and not caring to go back on an old pard, now that he is a man of wealth and position, he invited his visitor up to see him at his home.

"The visitor came, and Mr. Rayfield's valet being out, he admitted him himself.

"It was not long before Mr. Rayfield saw that the man was a fraud, and then a tragedy quickly followed, for the fellow said that he had come there to rob him, and he leveled a revolver full at the broker.

"Mr. Rayfield is no coward, but he was at the man's mercy, and would have been robbed but for the return of the valet, who entered with his pass-key and turned the attention of the robber to him.

"Coward as he was, the desperate fellow fired upon Ditson, the valet, killing him instantly, and as Mr. Rayfield rushed upon him, fired three shots at him, breaking the large mirror, shattering a costly statue, and sending the third bullet into the rosewood piano.

In the smoke Mr. Rayfield did not see the man dart out of the door, and having secured his own pistol, he followed him, but too late to catch him, and the alarm given was too late to capture the man."

New York Nat read over the other accounts of the affair, pasted all in his book, and then said:

"Now I will hear what Killer Bill's story is."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRAP.

CHUB did his work well, for he waited around the restaurant where Killer Bill always took his meals, with the patience of an Indian.

The landlord promised to point out the man to him whom he knew as William Billups, when he came in.

It was late in the afternoon when the landlord called to Chub, who had been a very good customer himself while waiting, filled up on pie, ice-cream and melons, and said:

"That's Mr. Billups over yonder at the table in the corner.

"He has just come in."

Chub went over to the table and said:

"Be you Mr. William Billups?"

He saw the man start, and glancing hard at the youth he answered:

"I am."

"I has a letter for yer."

"Who from?"

"I guess it tells."

"Who gave it to you?"

"A man as said he was your pal and give me two dollars ter find yer, so I has waited all day."

"Who is he?"

"Read yer letter an' find out, for I isn't paid ter tell yer what's in it."

The convict opened the letter and reading it asked:

"Where is Zip?"

"I'll take you there; but you better not go until dark, so I'll come back for yer."

"All right, I'll have my dinner and a smoke, and be ready."

Chub departed and going to Freckles's news-stand at once gave him word to have the three youths Nat had ordered, and who were in waiting, to go with all haste up to the Haunted Mansion.

Then he returned for Killer Bill and found him ready to go with him, it being almost twilight.

They took the Elevated Road, Killer Bill playing the gentleman and telling Chub to keep away from him, but he would watch and follow him.

When Chub got out so did the convict, and it was dark when the young ferret led the was to the old mansion.

"I guess Zip is rusticatin' to come up here," said the man as he now closely followed after Chub.

"He's in a mighty spooky place, but I hain't scared when anybody is along and he stays thar all alone by himself night and day."

"I don't like spooky places," said Killer Bill with a shudder, but he scaled the wall after Chub, who led him to the cellar door of the mansion and opened it with his key.

All was silent and dark within, but Chub said:

"Jist catch hold of my coat and I'll lead ther way."

"Has yer a gun?"

"You bet I hain't no durned fool to come without one."

"Well, don't use it even if yer sees a ghost, for ther cops would hear it and come a-run-nin', but it's all safe if yer don't shoot ter let 'em hear it."

"I've made ghosts, boy, I don't shoot 'em," way the grim remark, and Chub led the was up-stairs, asking again:

"Has yer a match?"

"Here is my match-box."

Chub felt for it and taking out a match lit it, and apparently getting his bearings once more moved on in the intense darkness, while Killer Bill growled:

"This is the spookiest old rookery I ever seen.

"Whar is Zip?"

"On ther top floor."

"He aint jist well, so is a-layin' down."

"All right, push ahead, so long as you don't go through some hole into the cellar."

"I won't."

Reaching the top floor, with Killer Bill still holding to his coat-tails, Chub opened a door and said:

"He's in thar."

"Say, mister I has brung him."

"All right, git out until I calls yer," came in the voice of Zip Ralston, and he continued:

"There's no mistake, Pard Bill, it's you is it?"

"You bet it is, and I recognizes yer voice, Zip, though why is yer in such darkness?"

"I hain't got a lamp, and I tole ther boy ter get me one, so I guess he's gone after it."

"Sit down, Bill, for there's a chair right here by me, and I got hurt in ther scrap with ther detective, so is takin' it easy."

And Killer Bill shuffled around in the dark, cursing himself for not having gotten his match-box back from Chub.

Calling to him and getting no reply, he said:

"Blame ther boy, he has run off with my match-box."

"He's gone to buy some candles, Bill, and will soon be back."

"What are you doing here, Zip?"

"Hidin'."

"Well, it's ther place you wants for that; but, why didn't yer wait for me?"

"I'm goin' ter tell yer, pard, and more, I've got a leetle game to play that will bring me in a good thing, and you're goin' ter git right in it."

"I'm yer man, but I wish I could see, for I hates ther dark," growled Killer Bill, as he drew his chair nearer and listened to the story of his pal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOLD IN THE DARK.

NEW YORK NAT knew that Chub was what the boys called lazy and a great "feeder," but he was true as steel, bright, clever and would do all that could be done in decoying Killer Bill into the trap he was setting for him.

So he made his arrangements accordingly, and moved a cot and a chair into a room on the top floor.

Then he sat down to have a talk with his prisoner and just see how far he could trust him in aiding to entrap Killer Bill.

If he promised him his liberty for doing so he would again turn loose upon the public a convict and a very bad man.

This he did not wish to do.

To secure his aid he would have to free him of his irons, and then the two men might resist and have to be killed, or kill some of the Boy Police, and this Nat wished to avoid above all things, unselfishly forgetting himself in thinking of his fellow ferrets, and besides not wishing to attract attention to the old mansion.

So he decided to try his own way to get what information he could out of Killer Bill and to capture him.

Zip Ralston was ready to betray his friend for terms, but Nat decided not to call on him until he saw that he had to do so.

"You have a very strange voice, Ralston," he said.

"I was always fond of ventriloquism and my friends say I can imitate perfectly, but I don't know how it would be with your voice."

"Try it."

Nat did try it and kept on trying it, and the result was that he struck the exact key in the tone of the convict's voice and soon could imitate it perfectly.

Satisfied on this point he asked no more and then arranged the cot and chair in another room.

Chub had his orders just what to do, and the plan was to lead Killer Bill up in the dark, and usher him into the room where Nat was to be lying upon the cot, a false beard and wig, and the coat of the prisoner covering him to resemble Ralston, should a match be lighted.

It has been seen how well Chub played his part, and got the match-box away from the convict, leading him into the room where his supposed pal lay on the cot.

Chub had slipped out then, and with the other three boys and sentinel waited outside for the signal.

Nor was this all, for crouched in one corner of the room was the masked Ferret Queen, with a pad and pencil in her hands, ready to take down as well as she could in short hand, all that was said, for she was an expert stenographer and had assured Nat that she could write without being able to see the characters.

"So you has a good thing of it, Zip?" asked Killer Bill, when he had heard the

story of how Zip had started to rob the supposed drunken gentleman, Sherman Canfield, and found out his mistake too late when he discovered that he had played into a detective's hands, as he had believed.

"But I bought him, Bill, as I writ you, and then I comed here whar I has hid more than once."

"It's a spooky old place, but safe as a church, and ther boy, whom I has befriended, brings me grub, as I is laid up a trifle."

"I wishes thet durned boy would return with a light," growled Killer Bill.

"Stores is scarce about this neighborhood and he hed to go a long way, I s'pose."

"Waal, what is the good thing yer has on hand that I'm inter with yer?"

"It's jist this, thet this old house belonged to a old miser, who hed lots of money."

"I know'd him, and he buried his money in ther cellar, and—"

"How does yer know?"

"I seen him, only I got jailed and never had a chance ter come back fer it."

"Ther gold is thar and plenty of it, and you can dig for it, as my arm is near broke, and we'll go shares."

"Done! it's as good as made, if ther money is thar."

"It's thar, for the place hain't been disturbed since I seen it last, and the miser was murdered, so nobody found the money, see?"

"Yes, an' I'm with yer, and it will come in great if I fails on a racket I has on hand."

"What's that?"

"Did you hear anything?" asked Killer Bill in alarm.

"No, I meant what was the racket you was onto."

"Oh, you scared me at first."

"Darn thet boy."

"Well, I'm in it with yer, hain't I?"

"Yas, of course, and I'll give it to yer straight, and when thet snail of a boy comes with a light, I'll read yer what ther papers said, and yer can see jist how my man lied about it; but I'll do him, as soon as I gits his money," said Killer Bill emphatically.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KILLER BILL TELLS HOW IT WAS.

KILLER BILL being assured of an interest with Zip Ralston in the supposed miser's treasure in the house, after a few preliminary remarks about Chub's long absence, the dark, and bating to talk when he could not see, went on to say:

"I has a chace, as I said, of making big money, and I guess you kin help me in it."

"Yer knows, I has told yer, that I was a gold-miner in New Mexico."

"Yes."

"Well, one meets all kinds o' people out there and I met one diggin' for gold who was sich a gent clean through thet we all tuck to him and him and me become pards, though he hed one partic'lar friend who hed gone out thar with him."

"Somehow thar was a coldness atween them, and they parted company, and then the one who was my pard come to me one day and tells me thet he hed struck it rich, if I'd only help him."

"I did help him, and his strikin' it rich was no more than thet his old pard had done so, and my help was to be in gittin' rid of him."

"Is yer listening?"

"You bet I be."

"It's so dark, owin' to thet durned kid's not comin' thet I can't see ter talk."

"He'll be back soon, so tell me yer game, pal."

"All right, I'll continue."

"Well, we got away with the young man, and my pard he paid me well and skipped out from the mines."

"Thet man I seen afterward a couple of

times and I struck him each time for money and got it."

"Ther next time I seen him was when you was with me at ther concert t'other evening."

"Well, I concluded, after I had lost you, to strike him ag'in, so I went down to his office and give a bluff, and he told me ter come up to his house and I went."

"He was cowed, after hearin' me threaten ter tell his girl all I know'd, and promised me the money I asked, which were only fifty thousand."

A whistle of surprise came from the recumbent form on the cot, and Killer Bill went on to say:

"I struck him big, for he's rich and I know'd I could get it as he is courtin' a lady who has got millions, or will have."

"At last he agreed to my terms, when I told him how he had tried to get rid of me in New York here, by havin' a man he paid big money to, turn state's evidence ag'in me, and pretend he was my accomplice in that murder of ther old man."

"Well, you knows now the man, and you bet I intends ter git ther fifty thousand, for I has a bigger claim than before on him now."

"Yes, I knows, but what other give-away has yer got on him, Bill?"

"He sent his man servant away when he expected me, intending to do me, and I jist escaped, as I was going out, not suspecting him, by dodgin' when I see him whip out a revolver."

"As luck would have it ther man servant had jist come back and let himself in with his key, and he got ther bullet aimed at me, and you bet I lighted down them stairs like I was goin' fer a doctor."

"I heard him fire more shots and wondered, and as I got into the lower hall he called out to stop the murderer, but he gave me time, seeing as I had not been kilt, and he didn't want me to be took and appear ag'in him."

"Well, ther papers tells the story as he gave it to the reporters, and I jist laughed all to myself to see how cunning he was."

"But his story goes, and so I don't trouble with it, bein' as I hain't hurt; but I intends ter make him pay more money now thet I has this new hold on him."

"Why, does yer know, he give me two hundred and fifty dollars ter live on, all friendly-like, until he could get his notes cashed at the banks and pass me what I demanded."

"But he's got ter pay more now, and we'll go to a foreign land, Zip, and live like gents in it."

"You bet we will; but has you a gun? for I'll go down stairs and see if I don't find that Chub asleep in the cellar, and I jist wants ter scare him good."

"Yes, I'd do it."

"You lend me your gun and jist wait here, for I won't be gone long."

"I hates ter part with one o' my best friends, Zip, for t'other is my money; but here it is, and don't stay long, or I'll get ther jim-jams in this black hole."

"I'll be back sooner than you think," and the revolver was taken from the hand of Killer Bill, the form on the cot arose and suddenly there was heard a shrill whistle.

At once the door was thrown open and the full glare of a couple of lamps revealed four forms in the doorway, and between them a huge dog, while with his disguise thrown off, and his revolver leveled at Killer Bill, stood New York Nat, master of the situation.

CHAPTER XXV.

NAT MAKES A VISIT.

"You asked to see me, sir?"

The speaker was Maybel Kingdon the beauty and the heiress, and she swept into the parlor of her palatial home like a queen in response to a card sent up to her and a

particular request to grant the visitor a few minutes of her time.

"Yes, Miss Kingdon, but I see that you fail to recognize one to whom you were so kind the day I was hurt in the Park in stopping your runaway team."

"Ah! I recognize you now, and glad am I that you have come, for long have I wished to reward you in some way for your great service to me on that day, and also to prove to me that you were not guilty of a crime of which I alone believe you innocent," and Maybel Kingdon spoke earnestly as she gazed into the fine face of her young rescuer.

"I guilty of a crime, Miss Kingdon?"

"There, your words, your looks prove that you were not."

"I left your house without thanking you, stole away like a thief, but I did no wrong, Miss Kingdon, acting only as my duty, under the circumstances, prompted me to."

"May I make a confession to you? that you will hold as a sacred secret?"

"You may."

"Then know that I am an amateur detective, unknown to even the Secret Service chief."

"I was on a duty the day of my accident that I felt I must not be known in, and so I crept away from your house."

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"Chandler, but it is as a secret I tell you, for I am performing a duty that keeps me unknown until it is accomplished."

"I shall so regard what you tell me, Mr. Chandler; but let me speak of the crime of which others accused you, I defending you."

"The day you left I had placed a pair of diamond earrings, my bracelet and rings, all of great value, worth some thousands of dollars, upon the mantel in the parlor."

"When you had departed search was made for them and they were gone."

"To whom did you speak of their loss?"

"I spoke of your mysterious departure to a gentleman friend, who came in to congratulate me upon my escape, and he made the unkind remark that you had doubtless carried off something of value with you."

"When I dressed for dinner I missed my jewelry and sent to my maid to get them, but they were not to be found, and Mr. Rayfield, who remained to dinner, laughed at me and said that his words had come true."

"Miss Kingdon, it is of Mr. Rayfield that I would speak, in fact came to see you about, and it is from the interest I feel in you."

"I have told you that I was a detective and now I beg of you to hear all that I say, patiently and without anger, for I assure you that every charge I make I can give you the full proof of."

"If I fail, you may have me arrested for stealing your jewelry."

"Will you hear me?"

"I will, for your words impress me strangely."

"I saw you some evenings since with Mr. Rayfield at a garden concert, and I then recognized him as one whom I had met before."

"I could not then place where I had then met him, but I have since done so, and it was in a pawnbroker's shop, where he was pawning some jewelry, a bracelet of diamonds, three finger rings, one a beautiful solitaire, another a ruby and emerald set together, and a third a ruby, diamond and emerald."

"There was also a pair of solitaire diamond ear-rings."

"I was in the next box to him, saw the things on the counter and his face in the mirror opposite, and heard him say that he had bought them for his wife, but had to part with them."

"He received a loan of three thousand on the jewelry, and I have since learned that Mr. Rayfield is in financial embarrassment."

"Indeed! and the jewelry you describe is just such as mine that was stolen."

"Go on I beg of you, if you have more to tell."

"This but a beginning, Miss Kingdon, for the stolen jewelry I knew nothing about until you told me that I was suspected of being the thief."

"You have more to tell then, sir?"

"I have all to tell, Miss Kingdon, for having heard that it was thought that you were engaged to Mr. Rayfield, he having so reported it, I wished to save you from one I knew to be a villain."

"As proof of what I say my sister took down in shorthand the confession of an escaped convict who made demands upon Mr. Rayfield, and it is here, all written by typewriter, with the whole story of Mr. Rayfield's guilty life as I have unraveled it page by page."

"You will find that in the rear of his broker's office he runs a lottery dive and gambling room, doing banking business in the front part of the building."

"He has met with heavy losses of late, and is expecting to save himself by marrying you."

"He is pledged to pay fifty thousand dollars to his old mining companion, the escaped convict known as Killer Bill, and who with another escaped convict who knows Mr. Rayfield, is my prisoner."

"I ask you to read that type-written copy of his life carefully, and then I desire to give you proof that I tell you only the truth by sending for Mr. Rayfield to come to a certain residence, for I can get him there, and you can be concealed behind the curtains of a window opening into another room, and hear all that I say to him and what he says to me."

"Will you do this, Miss Kingdon?"

"I will," was the firm reply of the beautiful girl.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PROOF.

SLOWLY and weighing each word Maybel Kingdon read the type-written copy, unfolding Ford Mayfield's guilty life.

When she had finished she said:

"I cannot doubt this, sir, but I want the proof you spoke of, for my father and brother might refuse to believe this, for it is not I that wishes to marry Mr. Rayfield, they urging it."

"Miss Kingdon, your brother owes considerable money to Mr. Rayfield, which he keeps his father from knowing of, and that shows his motive."

"My father likes Mr. Rayfield, and though I have regarded him as a friend I have never loved him."

"I wish the proof you offer, and more, I would like to know if those are really my diamonds that he pawned."

"You can ascertain, Miss Kingdon, by visiting the pawnbroker's, giving the date, describing the jewelry and demanding to see them."

"But to-morrow afternoon come to this address at two o'clock, and I will show you a place of concealment where you can see and overhear all that passes within the room, and I will be there and Mr. Rayfield, too."

"I will be there," was the firm reply, and promptly at the hour Maybel Kingdon drove up to the address given, the office of a lawyer friend, which Sherman Canfield had secured for the purpose.

In the adjoining room, behind the curtains of a window, Maybel Kingdon took her stand, while Nat awaited outside in another part of the building.

Soon Rayfield came, and was ushered into the office by Teaser, who said the party to meet him there would soon arrive.

Ford Rayfield's face was pale and wore a troubled look, and seating himself at a table, he began to write, while waiting.

Then the door opened and New York Nat

entered, showing no sign that he beheld the face of Maybel Kingdon peering through the curtains behind Ford Rayfield.

"You are Mr. Rayfield?" asked Nat.

"Yes. Where is the man who was to meet me here?" was demanded.

"He was too sharp to be caught a second time, so sent me."

"Ah! a boy?" with supreme contempt.

"Yes, a boy! but one who knows enough to hang you, you convict!"

The man staggered under the blow, and Nat continued:

"Oh, I know it all, for Killer Bill told me, and he says he enjoys the story you told about a man trying to rob you, and of the killing of your valet, when you shot him yourself in aiming at the other, and then, to carry out the deception, shot your mirror, piano and statuary full of holes."

"You see I know it all, and that you and Killer Bill killed a man in the mines and got his gold, and how you afterwards paid Bill to keep quiet, and then tried to hang him by having another man swear his life away."

"Now don't look dazed, for I can keep a secret, only Bill was afraid to trust you after all that had happened, and so sent me, for I am in it with him for all the money that can be got out of you."

"Bill wants me to say that you could have got off with the fifty thousand you pledged yourself to give, but having tried to kill him, and his having to take me into partnership, you have got to pay sixty thousand or I go to the inspector and give the whole snap away about you."

"So write down there your note to Bill for sixty thousand, due in thirty days, and if you do not pay it, then you know the result, and a silk cravat looks better on you than a hemp one, and that's what you'll get."

"Write the note, Mr. Rayfield, for time is short."

"If I refuse?" said the man speaking for the first time and with a face that had turned to the hue of death.

"Let me tell you before I answer, that if you expect to kill me, Killer Bill is on hand waiting, and he will go straight to the inspector with the whole story."

"You have me in your power, you accursed vampires, and I must submit to be robbed."

"I will have the money for you within the time named, for I can arrange it within a couple of weeks."

"Then, if either of you cross my path again, I will kill you as I would a mad-dog."

"Write that note, Mr. Rayfield, or Killer Bill may think you have done me up."

With a bitter oath, Ford Rayfield wrote as New York Nat demanded, Maybel Kingdon silently witnessing the act that was proof of his guilt.

As New York Nat took the note in one hand with the other he leveled a revolver and said:

"Ford Rayfield, you are my prisoner!"

With the words Sherman Canfield and several of the Boy Police stepped into the room, Maybel Kingdon disappearing quickly from the curtained window.

Crushed, Ford Rayfield was beyond the power of resistance, and sinking into a chair he uttered not a word, while New York Nat and Sherman Canfield, one on each side of him, led him from the house to a carriage in waiting.

He entered it silently, and they were driven to his home.

Once in his luxurious quarters he began to gasp for breath, and New York Nat, leaving Sherman Canfield with him, for he saw that it was no feigned attack, hastened for the nearest doctor.

The physician soon arrived but too late to render any service, for the man gasped out:

"It is my heart, doctor—I have had these attacks before—this is the last one, and it is better so."

The next day the papers spoke of the sudden death from heart failure, of Mr. Rayfield, while his friend, Mr. Sherman Canfield, of Nebraska, was visiting him, and that Doctor Polk had arrived quickly when sent for, but too late to save him.

The estate of Ford Rayfield was left for Craig Kingdon to settle up, and to the surprise of all, he left no more than to pay off his clerks, and the secret nature of his business was hushed up.

Many wondered why Maybel Kingdon did not attend the funeral, and others were glad to see that the death of his friend had made a new man of Craig Kingdon, for he at once gave up his wild life and settled down to business and endeavored to win back the respect and love of his father and beautiful sister, who, the day of Rayfield's death had a long talk with her erring brother, and which talk was the corner-stone of his reformation.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

The part played by New York Nat and his ferrets in the death of Rayfield was known only to Maybel Kingdon, the chief of the Secret Service and the band of Unknowns.

Try as she did, Maybel Kingdon could not find Nat, or get any clue to him, but she kept his secret as she had pledged to do.

She also had gotten her jewelry, or had her brother do so from the pawnbroker, for the ticket was found by Craig Kingdon among Rayfield's papers.

Thus the world did not know the story, and as Maybel had never acknowledged her engagement it was not believed by her friends when she showed no grief for the broker's death.

The inspector, through Sherman Canfield, some days after the burial of Rayfield, received two prisoners with the compliments of his unknown ally in Secret Service work.

Those two were Killer Bill and Zip Ralston, who were returned to their cells in the prison from which they had escaped, and, a reward having been offered for them, the chief deposited it with the many others he was holding subject to the order of his unknown allies.

"Yes, Mr. Canfield, this has been a most clever piece of work, unmasking Rayfield and running down those two escaped convicts, and in it I see as before the hidden hand of my unknown ally, a hand I hope some day to grasp in friendship, and thank as he deserves for all that he has done to crush crime and uphold the law."

So said the chief of the Secret Service to Sherman Canfield, who replied:

"Yes, chief, some day the Unknown will unmask themselves, the Hidden Hand will materialize."

THE END.

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